

MENTAL SUGGESTION A MEANS OF TEMPTATION

"Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." – Matt. 4:10.

SHORTLY after our Lord's baptism, He was led of His own spirit, illuminated by the Holy Spirit received at baptism, to go apart to the wilderness of Judea for a season of quiet study. It was at the close of this period of Bible study and prayer, when our Lord was weak from His forty-day fast, that the Adversary assaulted Him with subtle temptations.

We are not told how Jesus recognized Satan, but we are inclined to think that the Adversary was not visible to our Lord's natural sight, but to His mental vision – His eyes of understanding; for Satan, like the other fallen angels, has been under restraint of darkness until the Judgment of the Great Day. It is our thought that Satan was permitted to bring mental suggestions before our Lord's mind. Evidently our Lord recognized the source of these presentations as evil, in whatever way they came to Him.

The popular conception of Satan as a monstrosity with hoofs, horns, etc., is a superstition belonging to the Dark Ages. Really in his own personality he is a very glorious being, who has not been impaired by the six thousand years of alienation from God, although his countenance may have lost some of its Godlikeness.

SPIRITUAL POWER NOT TO BE USED SELFISHLY

In approaching our Lord, Satan did not attempt to lie outright, nor to distort facts, but rather to put a false color on them. He may have approached Jesus as a friend, who had known Him in His pre-existent state and who was deeply interested in His welfare. Satan's intrusion was, first of all, to give our Lord some kindly advice, by suggesting that since Jesus had been fasting for a long time, He was doing Himself

injury; and that if He really knew what power He possessed He would command those stones to be made bread.

Thus approached by one who was of a higher order of being than Himself, one who had not taken upon himself a bondman's form, it was natural that Jesus did not repulse Satan, but answered in a kind manner. Our Lord said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4.) I have made a full consecration of Myself to God, and am seeking to know His will, in order that I may do it, whatever difficulties may be involved therein. Therefore, since My life is consecrated, I will not use this holy power which I possess, to do anything for My own comfort or benefit in any manner.

SPIRITUAL POWER NOT TO BE USED FOOLISHLY

Foiled in his first attempt, the Adversary quickly changed the subject, not even dissenting from our Lord's decision. He then presented a second subtle temptation to use the Divine power given our Lord. We do not understand that Satan took our Lord bodily to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, but that he suggested a plan by which our Lord could bring Himself into prominence before the people and at the same time demonstrate that the power of the Most High God was upon Him.

Our Lord's quick mind detected the error, and He promptly answered: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." (Matt. 4:7.) Again changing his method of attack, Satan endeavored to give the impression that he himself was tired of the condition of rebellion against God in the world, and that he was ready to join our Lord in a great social uplift. Jesus probably knew that Satan was the Prince of this world and that his influence was everywhere felt.

SPIRITUAL POWER NOT TO BE USED CONTRARY TO GOD'S WILL

As in the second temptation, we do not think that our [R5084 : page 262] Lord was taken out of the wilderness, but that mental suggestion was used to influence Him to disobedience to the Father. In all the world there is no mountain from which all the kingdoms of the world can be seen. We understand the "mountain" to be a symbol of Satan's Empire, which is world-wide. Satan doubtless brought before the Lord's mind all that He knew of the great Roman Empire, and the wonderful influence which He as a perfect man could exert if He occupied a prominent position therein.

We can imagine Satan as saying, "Messiah is to be King over all the earth. I can easily and quickly help You into that position. Let us co-operate. I will make You chief ruler of the earth on the sole condition that You recognize me. I do not ask that You shall not recognize Jehovah; but that You shall be under my supervision. I can give You all this dominion without any trouble. Never mind the future; let me show You how to make progress *now*. I will get You into a good position, without removing anyone else. You will not be required to do anything very bad."

During the forty days in the wilderness our Lord had come to see that the dominion of earth could be attained only through great suffering. He was weak from His long fast, and all the details of prophecy were before His mind. He saw Himself as a lamb dumb before its shearers; as the serpent lifted up in the wilderness. Satan's suggestion was a temptation. But after consideration He saw that Satan was asking Him to violate His covenant – to go contrary to God's will. Immediately He answered, "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 our Lord, finding nothing to work upon – so loyal was Jesus to the very Word of Jehovah. Afterwards the angels came and ministered to Him.

EVEN FALLEN ANGELS EXCEL IN STRENGTH

The fact that Jesus discussed matters with the Adversary does not furnish us with an excuse to try our ability in this direction. For any of us, with our imperfect [R5085 : page 262] reasoning faculties, to get into a discussion with Satan or any of the fallen angels would be very unwise. There are doubtless reasons why our Lord conversed with Satan; but it would be very unsafe for us to do so. If we are sure that we have had a communication from fallen angels, let us remember that we are commissioned to preach to *men*, not to *angels*.

Some of the Lord's people have gotten into difficulty by not using the spirit of a sound mind along this line. Evil spirits have a way of drawing the unsuspecting on, little by little. They are "seducing spirits," as St. Paul tells us. (I Tim. 4:1.) A brother in the Truth once told us of his experience with them. Strange to say he was in the Truth when he had communication with the spirits. He did not say how he first got into communication with them, but he explained the Divine Plan of the Ages to them and told them what would happen to the fallen angels. For several days they manifested interest, coming frequently to hear him. After a while they began to dispute among themselves and finally to curse one another.

The brother had so cultivated the clairaudient power that he could hear them. In disgust he tried to get rid of them. Not only would they not go, but they made matters intolerable for him. Finally he wrote us in distress, asking what method to use to get rid of them. We advised him to go to the Lord in prayer, confessing that he had done wrong, and asking the Lord's forgiveness; then, in the name of the Lord, to command them to leave him. Afterward he wrote us that he had followed our advice, and after a tedious time had finally gotten rid of his unwelcome visitors.

POWERS OF EVIL INCREASING

As the time of trouble draws near, we can readily suppose that our Adversary will have increased power. Satan and his fallen angels will have a very baneful influence upon humanity.

Some peculiar occurrences have been brought to our attention. One was an account of a picture manifestation. A picture had been taken of a piece of property. When the photograph was developed it showed the likeness of a man who was recognized as a former owner who had been dead for some time. It seems evident, then, that evil spirits are able to exert some influence even upon a camera.

Another case was that of a person who declares that he actually saw certain things which could not possibly have taken place. How this could be we do not know. We do not know what powers evil spirits may possess. We have all heard of cases of mesmerism, hypnotism, etc., where the person under control of evil spirits was able to describe accurately things taking place at a distance. We cannot tell how these things are done. We assume that it is the fallen angels who have power so to impress the brain of the medium that she would seem to see what was being done in another city. In our dreams we see people walk and hear them speak. If we can have such mental pictures naturally, we may easily suppose that evil spirits may have power in this direction.

RESIST EVERYTHING AKIN TO OCCULTISM

The *facts*, however, do not make us understand the *philosophy* of the matter. Nor do we know to what extent these things will be used in the future. We have no doubt that some very startling events will occur. Even to those who have the knowledge of the Divine Plan the things permitted will be strange. We should be prepared for almost anything that may be told.

We have great confidence in the power of these evil spirits who claim to do wonderful deeds. In fact, we can see that while

materialization would be possible to them, yet a representation to the mind would be much easier. To impress a picture upon the brain would also be easy. Suppose such power were to be exercised, and the Lord's people misrepresented by the Adversary as doing some desperate act. Be prepared for all such things. It is too near the end of the race to think of turning back!

MY CONFIDENCE

"You ask me do I fear?
Should that child fear
Whose Father owns earth's store of precious things;
Whose *Will* carves destinies, whose *Wish* sways kings;
Whose *Love* surpasses fondest mother-love,
And whose unsleeping eye guards from above?

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"My Father is the Lord; I am His child.
His storehouse groans beneath a golden weight,
And I shall never want, though sore my strait.
When danger threatens and the way seems drear,
My Father's guiding hand is ever near;
His kindly counsel will my way attend
And bring me safely to my journey's end."
– *Unknown*.

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