

The Devil Made Me Do It

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

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How many of you remember Flip Wilson's character, Geraldine? One of her famous lines was, "The devil made me do it!" There is one hilarious bit from one of Flip Wilson's albums where Geraldine is trying to explain to her husband how she came to buy a new dress that day. Every time he asked her about it, she said, "The devil made me do it." She told him about how she was walking down the street past a dress shop window and the devil told her how good that dress in the window would look on her. She told the devil that she had already bought two dresses that week and wasn't going to buy another one. Then she said the devil pushed her into the door of the shop, and talked her into just trying on the dress...because it didn't cost anything to just try it on. Then after she tried it on, she said the devil pulled a gun on her and made her sign her husband's name to a check to buy the dress. That's how she got the new dress. She didn't want it...the devil made her buy it.

One of the reasons that "The devil made me do it" made it onto t-shirts, bumper stickers and everything else back then, was because it was funny. However, many a truth is said in jest. The truth is that many folks just don't want to take responsibility for their own actions. Yes, there is a tempter, but you and I are responsible for our own actions. Each of us has been tempted; nobody is immune. However, *we* make the decision to follow the Holy Spirit or succumb to the lies and temptations presented by the devil.

The story from Luke of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness communicates a number of ideas to us about temptation, about Christ and what it takes to resist the enticements of the devil.

As we read the passage the first thing we are told is that Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had just been baptized and the Holy Spirit had descended upon him. Not only does the Holy Spirit strengthen him spiritually, it gives him the wisdom he will need to accomplish his calling. You and I must take every opportunity to avail *ourselves* of what Wesley called, the means of grace. You received grace at your baptism. You received the fullness of the Holy Spirit at your profession of faith in Jesus Christ. You also receive grace and you experience the presence of Christ at the Eucharistic meal, through reading and meditating on the Scriptures, through prayer, through fasting, through service to others. All of these help you open yourself more to the influence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Next, we find Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where he would be tempted by the devil. This would be a time of strengthening his reliance on the Spirit of God within him. He had nothing else to sustain him in this time of barrenness. You and I are much like Jesus.

We enter into barren times when it seems we have nothing to sustain us...to strengthen us. The truth is we have the Spirit of God. Christ sent the Spirit to us when he left so that we could learn and be filled with the power of God.

Notice that the devil waited until Jesus was probably physically weak from lack of food before he tempted him to turn the stone into a loaf of bread. The enemy knows our weaknesses and tries to use them against us. In Jesus' case, the devil was trying to get Jesus to misuse the power of the Holy Spirit for his own benefit. But Jesus knew that the ultimate purpose of the Spirit of God resident within him is not to serve our own needs, but to glorify the Father. He combated this temptation by fortifying his mind with the Word of God. *"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"*

The second temptation offered by the devil was power, authority and acclaim. The devil said that authority over all of the kingdoms of the world was given to him, and he would give it to Jesus, if Jesus would only place the devil in the place reserved for God in his life.

Jesus knows that the devil can deliver on his offer – even if what he can deliver is fleeting in its reality. We can see that Jesus recognizes the devil's position as ruler in the present fallen world in John 14:30-31:

*"I don't have much more time to talk to you, because the ruler of this world approaches. He has no power over me, but I will do what the Father requires of me, so that the world will know that I love the Father."*

But once again Jesus fortifies himself with scripture and renders the tempter impotent. *"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"*

In the third temptation, Jesus was enticed to test God in such a way that if the Father did not respond it would look as if He did not care about his Son. How many times have you and I chosen to succumb to this one? We pray for someone to be healed or saved from death and they are not. When the situation does not turn out as we would have preferred we charge God with not caring...and some get so mad that they turn away from Him and the church completely. However, if we immerse ourselves in scripture, then we will have a better understanding of the mind of God and about our relationship with Him. Perhaps we will become more willing to let God be God, and quit presuming to give advice on how He should do his job. Jesus said, *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."*

Friends, there is no shame in being tempted, for even Christ himself underwent temptation. But I want to close by reminding us of two things:

- First, a temptation is just that – a temptation. You, alone, make the decision to resist or succumb. The devil can't make you do anything (no matter what Geraldine says); you make your own choices as you exercise the free will given to you by God. Should you make the wrong choice, don't blame anyone else. Own your mistake, and with contrition

go to your Father and confess your sin, then receive the forgiveness that awaits you in Christ Jesus.

- Second, model yourself after Christ so that you will be spiritually strengthened. Be proactive in your spiritual life and journey. Pray, fast, immerse yourself in the scriptures, worship, and participate in the Holy Meal. Jesus was blessed by the presence of the Spirit in his life, and you will be blessed, too.