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THE BONDAGE OF THE HUMAN WILL

BY: C. D. COLE

"And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," John 5:40.

This is one of the saddest sayings of the Scriptures. For healing the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus was persecuted by the Jews who sought to slay Him because it was done on the sabbath. And when He replied in the words: *"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,"* they sought the more to kill Him because He not only had broken the sabbath but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

Our text is a terse statement taken from His sermon to these Jews who would not believe on Him. He said to them, *"Ye search the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they testify of me. And yet ye are unwilling to come to me that ye might have life."* They boasted of their faith in the Bible; and yet refused to trust the Saviour of the Bible. And so it is today. Many people claim to believe the Bible, but have no use for the Christ of the Scriptures.

One of the most absurd claims of lost people is the claim to believe the Bible. If they believed the Bible, they would take the place of sinners, for the Bible says all have sinned; that there is none good, no not one. If they believed the Bible, they would realize their peril and flee from the wrath to come, for the Bible says a day of wrath is coming. If they believed the Bible, they would come to Christ for salvation.

1. Here we have a revelation of how to be saved. The sinner must come to Christ to be saved. No use going anywhere else. All other refuges are false and will fail in the day of judgment. There is no use coming to the

church for salvation. There is no use coming for baptism to be saved. There is no use coming to the priest or preacher. The sinner must come to Christ because He alone has dealt with the sin question. *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed,"* I Peter 2:24. *"For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,"* Heb. 9:26.

2. We have here a revelation of the human will. Men are unwilling to come to Christ. But they will put their hope in many other things: character, good works, church, sacraments, mercy of God. The trouble is with the will. And men can never be saved until they come to Christ...until they will to come. Whenever a man comes to Christ, he wills to come. He comes voluntarily, without coercion.

Some dictator might make you do something against your will. By torture, such was used in Russia, you might be made to tell secrets you did not want to tell. But there is no power on earth that can make you will to come to Christ. Your preacher may warn you; your parents may weep over you; your friends may pray for you and plead with you, but none of them can make you willing to come to Christ.

3. We have here a revelation of the human heart. The heart is the seat of understanding and affection. In his natural state, man's understanding and affection are perverted. The heart is deceitful and wicked.

The will is governed by the heart. The will is the heart in action--and the heart is always in action. Men do evil because they love evil. People do not come to Christ because they do not want to come. Why do people not repent? Because they love sin.

Nobody can change the human heart but God. We are in the realm of the miraculous when we face the human heart. Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots? Can a camel go through the eye of a needle? When these things can be done, then you may talk about men changing the human heart.

Circumstances might make you eat black bread and cabbage soup, but they could not make you prefer them to sirloin steak and strawberry shortcake. Circumstances might make you reform--for certain reasons a man might give up whiskey and other sins--but circumstances cannot make you love God and trust Christ. *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,"* John 1:12, 13.

4. This leads us to the last thought: *"No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him."* This is saying that no man can will to come to Christ unless God draws him. God's drawing power makes him willing to come to Christ. Do not confuse this with the physical.

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THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

BY: C. D. COLE

"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, 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," Matthew 4:1-11.

Three historians give us an account of the temptation of Jesus Christ-- Matthew, Mark and Luke. Their gospels are called the synoptics because they give us a common picture of Jesus in human and earthly relationships. Matthew presents Him as King; Mark as the perfect servant of Jehovah; and Luke as a perfect man-- John presents Him in His deity.

We shall make some general observations before taking up the details of the temptation.

1. We have before us a personal devil whose objective is the dethronement of God and destruction of man.

He began his career in heaven where he sought to usurp the place of God. Sin had its origin in Satan when he said, *"I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will be like the Most High."* In this rebellion he was followed by a great host of angels who are known as fallen angels in distinction from the elect angels. When God had made man in His own image and likeness, and placed him in the Garden of Eden, Satan successfully tempted him and brought the human race into a fallen state. And since that time, his purpose has been to prevent the salvation of men.

In the temptation of Christ we see one of his efforts to prevent the salvation of sinners. Had he succeeded with Christ, there would have been no Saviour.

All through the Old Testament we see Satan trying to prevent the coming of a Saviour. As recorded in Genesis 3:15, he had heard God announce that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. And immediately he tried to prevent the fulfillment of this prophecy by causing Cain to kill his brother, Abel. We are told that Cain was of that wicked one and slew his brother. We see his hand in the corruption of human society that made the flood a necessity when only Noah and his family were spared. And even Noah was spared because he found grace in the sight of God. We see the hand of Satan all through human history as he tried to destroy the Messianic line-- the line through which the Messiah was to come.

When he had failed to prevent the birth of the Saviour, he sought to kill Him by having Herod issue his decree calling for the death of all the children of Bethlehem and the vicinity within the age bracket of the infant, Jesus. He must have thought he had succeeded, but God warned Joseph of the danger and told him to flee with the child.

Satan must have been startled when God proclaimed Jesus as His Son when He was baptized by John.

2. We see the providence of God in the temptation. Then was Jesus led

up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Mark says He was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness and for forty days was tempted.

The word "tempt" in the original means to test, try, or prove. It is used in both a good and an evil sense. Our English word used to carry this twofold connotation, but now it is used only in the evil sense. The moral character of the testing depends upon the object in view and the means employed. If the object is to incite or entice one to do wrong, or if the means used are sinful, then the temptation is bad. If the object is to prove the character of a person and the means used are lawful then the temptation is good. In the sense of enticing one to do wrong, God never tempts any man, but in the sense of proving one's character, He tempts, as in the case of Abraham.

In the temptation of Christ the devil tried to get Him to sin, but God was proving His Son as a qualified Saviour.

3. We should never rush into temptation but should pray not to be led into temptation. To rush into temptation as if we felt able to get the victory is pride. But as James says, *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptation. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience,"* James 1:2, 3. When we fall into temptation, Christ will be there to succour us and God will not let us fall into temptation without making a way of escape.

Now let us look more closely at the three-fold temptation of Christ in the lesson passage. This was a special temptation, but not the only temptation for all the days of our Lord were days of temptation. We are told that the devil left Him for a season. When Satan could not prevent His advent into the world, he tried to keep Him from the cross. On one occasion when He was telling His disciples about going to Jerusalem to be put to death, Peter remonstrated and said, *"Be it far from thee, Lord."* Christ saw the hand of Satan in this and said, *"Get*

thee behind me Satan for thou art an offence unto me." And even while on the cross, the crowd said, *"Come down from the cross and we will believe thee."*

The time of this special temptation was immediately after His baptism. It was at His baptism that He was proclaimed to be the Son of God. This was the time of His inaugural and marked His assumption of the office of Saviour. Here was hell's response to heaven's challenge in the inauguration.

1. The first temptation was in the wilderness. *"If thou be the son of God, command that these stones be made bread."* Let us not be misled by the word "if." The Son is emphatic and the mood is the indicative, not the subjunctive. Satan was too smart to begin his temptation by expressing a doubt about the Sonship of Jesus. The "if" has the sense of since--Since thou art the Son of God make bread out of these stones. The first temptation assumes the Sonship with power to work miracles. Since thou art the Son of God, and able to do wonders, being faint with hunger, convert this stone into a loaf of bread and satisfy thy hunger. This was very subtle. What is wrong in satisfying physical hunger? Christ replies by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* Christ is saying that obedience to the Word of God must come before the satisfaction of physical desires. Christ knew He was where God wanted Him and He would trust God to take care of Him. This was a temptation to take Himself out of the hand of God and provide for Himself. It has been called temptation to be under-confident or to lack trust in God.

Whether it was wrong to make bread or not depended upon who was suggesting it, and the reason for it. Christ would not make bread at the suggestion of Satan, neither would He make bread to meet His own needs. He would remain in the hand of God and trust Him for bread. Christ could and did make bread--He fed 5,000.

2. The second temptation was in the holy city. Here is a change of scene and a change of tactics. From the pinnacle of the holy temple the devil said, *"Since thou art 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 anytime thou dash thy foot against a stone." The devil quotes from Psalm 91. The devil is never more dangerous than when dealing with Scripture. He misquotes and misapplies Scripture; you do well to trust God for food; now carry your trust a little further; trust God to keep you from being hurt in jumping off the temple. Christ's reply comes like a bolt of lightning. *"It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."* Here the word "tempt" is used in the evil sense. You can test God wrongly and also rightly. To put God to the test at the suggestion of Satan would have been wrong. But if God had said, "Cast thyself down," the passage quoted by Satan would have been pertinent. In Malachi 3:10, we have an example of testing God in the good sense. There He commands His people to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and prove Him.

To rush into danger or create a difficulty in order to prove God's protecting care is to tempt God in the bad sense.

3. The third temptation was on a very high mountain. From this point the devil shows Christ all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and offers to give them to Him on the one condition of falling down and worshipping him, the devil. The devil no longer quotes Scripture as in the two previous temptations. There was no Scripture that could be twisted to justify such a thing. Here the devil throws off the mask of piety and appears in his true form as God's rival. In the previous temptations he appears to be the friend of God and recommends trust in God. But here he claims supremacy and demands trust in himself as God's competitor. Here the devil offers a bribe for worship. I will give you all the kingdoms with all their glory if you will **acknowledge me as supreme.** The devil usurps the place of God as owner of this world and all that is in it. *"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein,"* Psalm 24:1. The devil denies this--claims it his own.

Three times Christ calls the devil

the prince of this world and Paul speaks of him as the god of this world. This can only mean that the devil is god only by human suffrage and not by divine ordination. Humanity has willingly subjected themselves to the devil's rule. They have rebelled against the true God and become the ally of the devil. This is the essence of sin. God did not deliver the human race to the devil; the devil captured the race in Eden. II Timothy 2:24, 26.

Christ no longer deals with the devil as a pretended friend but calls him Satan; sends him away with Deut. 6:14 ringing in his ears. *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."*

Matthew tells us that the devil left him; that angels ministered unto Him-- Luke says he left Him for a while.

The devil was trying to keep Christ from the cross. He knew that at the cross Christ would destroy him that had the power of death. He knew that it would be on the ground of His cross work that Christ would spoil him of his goods. Satan knows, (some men do not) that redemption is by the blood of Christ. He wanted to keep Christ, the redeemer, off the cross.

Jesus was tempted objectively, but there was no inner conflict in resisting the temptation. Men yield in temptation to escape the pressure, but Jesus faced the pressure without any desire to do what He was asked to do. He suffered, but he did not yield. He wanted food, and protection, and dominion, but not at the cost of disobeying God. Truly, our Saviour could say, *"The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me,"* John 14:30.

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We are in the realm of the moral and spiritual. We are in the realm of the affections. We are in the realm of the unseen, for the kingdom of God cometh not with observation. You cannot witness the spiritual birth as you can the physical. You can see the effects of it in a changed life, but you can't see the Spirit perform the new birth. The throne room of the human soul is entered by nobody but God. All human physicians are excluded from the birth room--this is a birth from above.

What I have been trying to set forth may be illustrated by a sort of parable:

Suppose a number of subjects of an earthly king have committed high treason, are under the sentence of death, and are in prison, awaiting the day of execution. No injustice is done them if they are all left to perish. In the eyes of the king, they all deserve to die. But the king, willing to make his mercy shown, and seeing that it will promote the happiness of his kingdom to pardon a part of them, while its safety demands that some of them shall perish, resolves to vindicate his justice while he displays his mercy.

Let us suppose the king to be a prophet. (Some kings have been prophets.) He therefore sees beforehand just how each prisoner will act. He determines on his own course and with thousands of his subjects leaves his palace for the prison where his rebellious subjects are confined. The doors are unlocked and the chains are knocked off, and the king makes a speech something like this: "Unhappy men, I have put it in your power to be free. No bolt or chain confines you to your cell. If you will now approach me, confess your crimes, ask my forgiveness, and submit to my government, I will not only pardon you, but make you my sons." To this speech they all reply, "We cannot do this." "What hinders?" asks the king, "the door is open, the chains no longer bind your limbs." And in unison they reply: "We humble ourselves at your feet and confess ourselves criminals deserving death! We ask pardon at your hands! Never! We prefer some other

way out."

Now the king turns beggar and entreats them with tears and strong crying. He says, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" They still refuse. He then appeals to the spectators: "Do I cause the death of these men?" All answer, "No." "Are they not as free to accept life as they are in their refusal?" The spectators answer, "They are." "Can more be reasonably expected of me?" "Nothing more," is heard from every one.

Thus far, all of these criminals have fared alike. All have had the good news of pardon preached to them, and all alike have refused. All have refused his mercy and spurned his grace. Will he leave them all to die? If he does, how will he make his mercy known among his subjects? How will he display his pardoning power? The spectators are in breathless anxiety to see what he will do.

We will now suppose that the king has the power with a touch to melt them into contrition. He stretches forth his hand and lays it on half the number. At once they fall on their knees and implore his mercy. They confess their crimes and agree that they are worthy of death. The king pardons them and adopts them as his sons. This last act was as free as their refusal had been. They willingly submitted. But it was the result of His magic touch.