

“You shall not tempt the Lord thy God” Matthew 4:5-7

by David Kidd

This command is elsewhere translated ‘you shall not put your God to the test.’ This article helps us to begin to delve into its relevance for us.

When Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down’ Satan believed that this would indeed be tempting to Jesus. Satan, who must have thought that Jesus would have been very weak physically after enduring 40 days and nights of fasting, hoped to deceive Jesus into the sin of putting God to the test. Satan also said “For it is written: ‘He shall give his angels charge over you ... In their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone’.” Jesus, who was very alert to Satan’s evil tempt, replied, “It is written again, ‘you shall not tempt the Lord your God’.”.

To fully understand the relevance of this command to us we must read where Jesus quoted from. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, which in turn leads us to Exodus 17:1-7, where the Israelites at Massah committed this terrible sin. Basically, at Massah, not long after God had heard their strong complaints about lack of food and then gave them manna, the Israelites again contended with Moses and God because of their lack of water. They were almost ready to stone Moses if they did not get water and complained that they had been brought out of Egypt by Moses (and hence God) to die of thirst. Verse 7 in a few words defines their sin – “They tempted the Lord, saying, ‘Is the lord among us or not?’” Delving deeper into the nature of this sin we also see that it involves the following five aspects which Jesus was wise enough to avoid.

Rebelliousness

If we do anything we know Satan wants us to do, it is rebellion against God, because we should never heed Satan. It amounts to not following God’s will, but rather our own, thus putting God to the test. Also the Israelites rebelled against Moses, who was appointed by God. Rebelling against God’s authority and His appointed leaders, which includes pastors, elders and deacons, puts God to the test. If Jesus had jumped He would have been doing His own will in rebellion against God.

Unseemliness

The Israelites at Massah were seeking something from God (water) in the wrong way. They not only complained against God’s anointed, but they also rudely demanded water. Jesus also would have been seeking God’s protection in the wrong way by jumping because of Satan’s challenge. We are putting God to the test when we seek anything from Him in the wrong way, or in inappropriate ways. One modern day example in the church is when people pray to God ‘I command you Holy Spirit ...’. I heard this recently at a prayer meeting. A significant section of Christianity has turned the boldness we are to have in prayer into rudeness and irreverence towards God. This surely and sorely puts God to the test.

Presumptuousness

The sin of presumptuousness is very similar (see Psalm 19:13 & 2 Peter 2:10). People put God to the test when they behave inappropriately, but nevertheless presume God will still help them. Certainly that was what the Israelites did at Massah. So too, if Jesus had jumped, he was really presuming upon God's salvation inappropriately. Common examples of such presumptuous behaviour include praying for good health whilst neglecting or abusing our bodies, or praying for our children's spiritual well-being, but not bringing them up in God's ways. Do we ever recklessly or carelessly do the wrong thing while still trusting in God to work things out for us for good? We can't insist that God should back us up what ever we do. The Apostle Paul writes 'shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!' (Romans 6:1-2).

Faithlessness

The Israelites at Massah also failed to trust God when they had every reason to trust Him given the many miracles He had previously done for them, including the very recent one of the manna. We also test God, whom we have every reason to trust, when we start to doubt Him. Sometimes those who seek sensational miracles really have doubt in their hearts toward God and whether God is really with them. Satan challenged Jesus as to whether He was truly God's *beloved* Son perhaps in light of what Jesus had just been through and what God was yet to allow Him to suffer. Jesus however was mature enough and secure enough not to doubt God's love for Him and not to need His miraculous proof.

We too should consider the subtle ways we might be showing faithlessness hence putting God similarly to the test. For example when we pray to God, 'if you ... *then* I will' or 'I won't do this or that *unless* you do such and such' ... or 'unless you speak to me or lead me I will just wait and do nothing until I hear from you.' We may also sin this sin when we question whether God is amongst us (as a church) or in us (as an individual), or when we question 'where is God?' Let's not forget all the wonderful things we know He has already done for us, as the Israelites did.

Provocativeness

The Israelites insolently and provocatively challenged God, through Moses, to see what His reaction might be. They even went so far to 'contend' with God in an angry way, condemning God and justifying themselves. Job erred in a similar way, although perhaps more from despair than anger. God said to Job, "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him. He who rebukes God, let him answer it ... Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Job contritely responded, "Behold, I am vile ..."(see Job 40:1-9). Jesus, if He had jumped, would have been behaving in a similar way as it would have been a provocative and insolent (disobedient) challenge to God to save him from hitting the ground. The slightest disobedience from the Son would have been extremely serious behaviour because of its far reaching consequences for all of humanity. To insolently and provocatively challenge God is to put Him to the test.

Conclusion

Our Lord Jesus had the maturity and wisdom not to fall into the sin of putting God to the test even whilst under Satan's severe testing. Knowing the Word of God and being very

close to God through prayer and fasting were vital to His spiritual strength. Sometimes we sin because we are ignorant of what the Bible really says or because we have not remained close to God. May Jesus' example encourage us - May He always be our inspiration.