

CHRISTIANS KNOW WHEN TO QUIT

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ July 31, 2016



Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

I call out to the Lord and he answers me from his holy mountain,

January 3, 1993, Buffalo, New York, the site of the largest comeback in National Football League history. The game featured the Houston Oilers and the Buffalo Bills. In the first half of the game, the Houston Oilers, led by their quarterback Warren Moon raced out to a 28-3 halftime lead, they added yet another touchdown early in the 3rd quarter to go up 35-3. Many people's thoughts were summarized by the words of a Houston radio announcer, "The lights are on here at Rich Stadium, they've been on since this morning, you could pretty much turn them out on the Bills rights now." There was no possible way that the Buffalo Bills were going to come back being down 32 points!

But the Buffalo Bills never gave up, there was no quit. And slowly but surely, they fought and clawed their way back into the game, going on to win in overtime by the score of 41-38. I'm sure there are plenty of stories like that – whether in sports, the movies, or even real life, where the phrase "Never Quit, Never Surrender" could be used. It's part of the American Dream, right – work hard, don't give up, chase your dreams. So it might come as a little bit of a surprise, that in this mountaintop experience, we are taught to give up, we are taught when to quit.

Normally quitting is looked at as a bad thing, being called a "quitter" is an insult, not a compliment. But when we take a close look at the three temptations of Jesus, quitting is not just something that a Christian should do, but something that a Christian must do. Quitting may not be seen in a positive light in a lot of things, but in Christianity, it is necessary. And CHRISTIANS KNOW WHEN TO QUIT.

1. The devil didn't
2. But you do

(1)

Now, before all of this happened, before Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, we have to go back to another significant temptation. That temptation is what we heard about in our first lesson for this morning, when the devil, disguised the form of a snake, tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. **"Did God really say you couldn't eat from any of the trees in the garden?"** The devil planted the seed of doubt in Eve's mind, a seed that would be her downfall. That simple little temptation had massive ramifications. That simple little temptation is where the devil got his start.

After that simple temptation, the devil would continue to tempt and tempt and tempt and tempt. Each and every time he tempted someone to sin, he won. True, there may have been resistance by some, but even they too eventually succumbed to his temptations. The Old Testament is full of examples of people falling into temptation. The eldest son of Adam, Cain killed his brother. Abraham pretended his wife was his sister because he was afraid of getting killed. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba. The people of Israel abandoned God and were led away into captivity. The entire Old Testament seems to be a train-wreck of believers (and unbelievers) falling into the devil's temptations.

To be fair, the devil had it pretty easy. Not only were people susceptible to being tempted, this was now their natural leaning. As the Bible puts it, they were **"dead in sin."** And so all this time, it seemed like the devil was winning, the ultimate victory he claimed over every single person was death. Every single person he tempted to sin, died. This is the important lead up to Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. And even though you continue to struggle with temptations on a daily basis, you would be missing the main point if you just thought that Jesus is merely showing you how to fight against temptation. "Be like Jesus!" If that were the case, then imagine how depressed you would be. Because even though you've heard this story, even though you may have studied this story, I will guarantee you that you will once again fall prey to the devil's temptations.

So when we look at this story of Jesus' temptation, instead of focusing on *how* Jesus fought temptation, we must focus on *why* Jesus fought temptation. Scripture records, **"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."** Up until this time, the devil had claimed victory over every one of God's people. But for 30 years, Jesus had been immune to the devil's temptations. But now the devil was given a prime opportunity, a prime opportunity to fell his enemy. And the wording in Scripture tells us that the devil was tempting Jesus constantly during his 40 days in the wilderness, not just these three times that are recorded for us. If the devil could get Jesus to sin, he wouldn't have just won a major victory, he would have won the war.

But lest you think the devil had a chance, we mustn't forget who he was up against here. Yes, Jesus was true man, just like all the other humans he had tempted before, but he was also true God, able to withstand the devil's temptations. So why did the devil attack Jesus if he knew that he had no chance? That's a good question. Perhaps the best answer is that sin, or deviation from God, leads people to do unreasonable and illogical things. In short, the devil didn't KNOW WHEN TO QUIT.

In these three temptations which are recorded for us, the devil brings out the same temptation about doubt. The first temptation seemed so innocent: **"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."** There would be nothing wrong with that, would there? Except, Jesus had just endured a 40 day (and night) fast, a fast for God. To use his power to create loaves of bread would show a lack of trust in God the Father to be able to provide for him.

The second was similar, but this time, the devil disguised his temptation using Scripture. After taking Jesus to the temple, he urged him to fall off saying, **"He will command his angels concerning you, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."** "Imagine what the people would think when they see you fall down from the temple without a scratch. They're bound to follow you then" was essentially what the devil was telling Jesus.

The third might seem the most absurd of all to us. Jesus is taken up on a high mountain, a mountain of temptation, and the devil says he'll give him the kingdoms of the world, if only he will bow down and worship him. "Jesus, you don't have to go through this life perfect, you don't have to go to the cross, I'll give you all of that, without the pain and suffering, just bow down this once, no one has to know."

Each one of these temptations was hand-picked for Jesus, each one of these temptations was "tempting" to Jesus, and each one of these temptation was refuted by Jesus. Jesus showed complete trust in his Heavenly Father to provide for him after his fast. Jesus corrected the devil's misapplication of Scripture by saying **"Don't put the Lord your God to the test."** And Jesus refused to take the easy road and instead said, **"Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."** The devil didn't KNOW WHEN TO QUIT, and he lost. **"Be gone!"** Jesus said, and then was immediately comforted by angels.

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When we take a look at this account, what do we see? We see Jesus fighting temptation for us. And it was not just these three times, but throughout his life, throughout his three years of ministry as the devil constantly tried to get him to fall. But each and every time, the devil failed. Because he didn't know when to quit.

Now chances are as Christians, we can't relate to what the devil was trying to do. We can't relate to actually trying to tempt God or to prove him wrong. In fact, a lot of the time, I think we try to be the opposite. I think we try to actively pursue God's will, God's laws, and God's ways. But there's a danger in that. There's a danger in when we're trying our very best to please God, we can actually confuse ourselves into thinking that we actually can please God with our actions.

We give ourselves a pat on the back when we've successfully resisted that habitual temptation (one time), or when we've gotten up out of bed for worship or a Bible Class. We get that fuzzy feeling when volunteer our time, or send some money off to that worthwhile charity. We think we're doing pretty well if we've actually made it through reading our Bible cover to cover one time or can answer a Bible Study question with more than the words, "Jesus" or "God." Or maybe we're proud that we're not like those other Christians who compare themselves with others. Any way you slice it, there's danger in thinking you're a pretty good Christian.

Because if being a Christian is about how good you've acted, how faithful you are to God, how loving you are to your neighbor, you've been a pretty lousy Christian. Because for all those times you have done something Christian-like, how often have you done something non-Christian-like? Being a Christian is not about trying your hardest, it's not about resisting temptation, it's not about getting rid of all the sin in your life. Because if it were, we would all be on the path to hell, due to just one of our sins.

That's why a Christian needs to KNOW WHEN TO QUIT. A Christian quits any idea of goodness in me, a Christian quits any notion of trying to please God, a Christian quits their own self. CHRISTIANS KNOW WHEN TO QUIT because they know getting to heaven is not about anything they do, but instead on what Christ did. So Christ did not face temptations to show us how to face temptations, a "be like Jesus example," but he faced temptations in our place, just like he faced everything in our place. And just like we need to quit any thought of getting to heaven by our actions, we also need to quit the fearful notion that Jesus didn't do enough.

The Bible says Jesus did enough, and that those who quit themselves and believe in him have eternal life already. A quitting Christian is then freed from all the burden of keeping God's law and can rather focus on God's gospel. A gospel that flows freely from his Word. A CHRISTIAN WHO KNOWS WHEN TO QUIT, will not quit reading God's Word, will not quit acting like a Christian, will not quit demonstrating God's love to those around them – whether that be in school, at work, or at a local sports bar. A CHRISTIAN KNOWS WHEN TO QUIT and when not to.

Three decades before the largest comeback in NFL history, a coach walked into the locker room of an NFL team which had finished with one win and ten losses the year before. He said if any player was fine with losing, they could get out of that locker room. That coach turned the team around and ended up winning 5 NFL Championships. One of his most famous quotes is, "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." That coach was Vince Lombardi. While that quote may be true on the football field, it's not true in your Christian walk. The only way a Christian gets to heaven is if they quit trying to get there, and realize Jesus has already given it to us. Be proud to be a CHRISTIAN WHO KNOWS WHEN TO QUIT. Amen.