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TEMPTATIONS: JESUS' AND OURS
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The devil tempted Adam and Eve, and they sinned. We, the children of Adam and Eve, are tempted, and we sin. Jesus was tempted, but He did not sin.

How does temptation work? Something looks attractive or appealing to us because it seems to offer us something good, but it is actually something bad or harmful to us. Temptations often appeal to our feelings, appetites, or desires for our lives to be comfortable or easy. Temptations claim that whatever might cause us pain or hardship in life is bad and that we should avoid any suffering and do only what feels good to us; whatever threatens what is pleasurable to us should be avoided. Temptations encourage us to go with what is currently acceptable, not what God's eternal Word says. Temptations claim that being popular and accepted by those around us is the highest good.

How can we learn in faith to recognize temptations when they come and not be deceived and fall to them and sin?

Adam and Eve found out the hard way. What the devil offered them looked good and appealed to their desires for pleasure, power, and autonomy, but when they took what was tempting them, they found out that it was just the opposite. The devil used the same ploy when tempting Jesus. The devil claimed that what he had to offer Jesus was something good, not bad. The devil even claimed that God approved of it. Jesus saw through the lies, resisted and rejected the temptations. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus' temptations did not lead to Him sinning.

Before getting into the details of these temptations, all of us need to pay attention to God's Word on temptations. Since they will come to all of us, temptations need to be recognized as such and resisted with all our strength. Because we are sinful, we will fall to temptations and sin so we must rely on God's grace and mercy to forgive our sin and save us. When we succumb to temptations and sin, in faith we must turn to Jesus. Since He did not sin when tempted, He is able to forgive our sins.

There is a difference between temptation to sin and sin itself. The devil tempted Adam and Eve before they sinned. Jesus was tempted in all ways like we are, yet He did not sin (Heb. 4:5). When Christians are tempted, we can resist those temptations and not succumb to them. Adam and Eve became sinners, and we are sinners just as much as they. When the desire to sin arises in our hearts and minds, we have crossed over into sinning. When we want what God has forbidden us, we are sinning.

The Small Catechism reminds us that temptations are not just from the devil, like we have heard about today with Adam and Eve and Jesus. Temptations also arise from the sinful world we live in as well as our own sinful natures, our flesh. The Old Adam, who remains in us after coming to faith, is an unbeliever and always wants to sin. The Old Adam in us needs to be drowned and killed off every day through contrition and repentance, sorrow for our sins and faith that trusts in God's forgiveness of sins in Christ. The new man, the believer that God has made us, needs to resist and restrain the Old Adam, struggle against sin, and strive always to do what is right.

Temptation is not sin itself but can and does lead to sin. Christians must recognize what sin is, and when we are being tempted to sin, we can and must resist that temptation and not give in to it.

Jesus came to undo the disastrous fall into sin by Adam and Eve that has led to everyone born since then to be born with original sin that leads to sinning when tempted. Jesus came to defeat the devil and his temptations, which was what Jesus was doing fasting out in the wilderness. After Jesus was baptized, He **was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil**. At that point, the devil was the undefeated champion against all humans. Every human had fallen to his temptations. The devil was like Goliath the Philistine mocking his opponents cowering in fear, until Jesus, the Son of David, stood up to him and defeated him once and for all. This is what Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," is basically about.

There are parallels between the temptations the devil put before Adam and Eve and later Jesus. These same sorts of temptations still assault us.

The word “devil” means “slanderer.” After the serpent-devil slandered God by saying His Word of warning about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a lie, that eating its fruit would not lead to their deaths, Moses writes that Eve “**saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes.**” A temptation holds up something as if it is good and desirable to us, when it is not. Eve’s logic: “God made the tree; the fruit looked good to eat; what’s wrong with eating it, especially if I can become like God if I do?”

The devil tempted Jesus, who was hungry from fasting forty days and nights in the wilderness, to use His power as the Son of God to turn stones into bread. The devil’s temptation was that Jesus did not need to suffer hunger or hardship in this world. He had the power to avoid suffering. Why not use it? When we are suffering in this life, we need to remember that God will use it to work things for our good. No one likes to suffer, but we cannot disobey God to avoid this suffering.

The problem with disobeying God to avoid suffering is that this shows we don’t have faith in God; we don’t trust His Word that He will take care of us. If Jesus had not trusted God to provide daily bread when He was hungry and avoided suffering then, He would never have been willing to endure the ultimate suffering and death of the cross. Jesus’ quote of Deuteronomy 8:3, “**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,**” was Moses’ reminder to the Israelites that God had provided manna in the wilderness; His people should trust that God He would continue to give all that was needed. We should trust this Word when tempted to take the easy way and sin.

The devil’s lie to Adam and Eve about not dying by eating the forbidden fruit is like his temptation of Jesus to trust in God by throwing Himself off the top of the temple because God’s angels would prevent His injury and death. What would be wrong with Jesus, the Son of God, using His power to bring glory to Himself like this? God did not send His Son to use His power for His own glory, but for the good of others. The way Jesus draws people to Himself in faith is by being lifted up on the cross to suffer and die for their sins. Jesus rejected the devil’s false use of Psalm 91 by quoting God’s warning through Moses, “**You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.**”

The Israelites tested God when they complained that they were dying of thirst in the wilderness, claiming that God was killing them.

We are warned not to “test” or “tempt” God the same way. We should not tempt God to punish us as we deserve by taking matters into our own hands because we think God won’t give us what we want or need. We are warned to not seek the world’s approval and glory but rather trust in God’s ways. Jesus floating down from the top of the temple would have been a spectacular sight and made Him very popular in worldly terms, but that was not the glory God had for Him. For us to seek things that would make us popular rather than accepting the cross God has for us will mean death for us.

The devil’s lie that Adma and Eve would become like God, **“knowing good and evil,”** was basically the temptation to rule the world for their own benefit and not according to God’s plan. “Become your own gods and decide for yourselves what right or wrong; don’t let anyone tell you what you can and cannot do!” This, essentially, is the religion of the world these days and is acclaimed as morally good and empowering. But this is self-worship and self-centered living rather than worshiping and serving God and loving our neighbors. Our answer to this temptation is the same as Jesus’. **“You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.”**

When tempted and we sin, God’s Word of Law confronts us and our answer cannot be like Adam’s to blame his wife, or Eve’s excuse, “The devil made me do it.” As sinful children of Adam and Eve, we must be aware of our weaknesses and the things that tempt us to sin. The sorts of temptations we face will change depending on what point in our lives we are at, but temptations are sure to come.

God has made us His children in the Church; we are not the children of the devil. By the power of the Holy Spirit through God’s Word, we can recognize the lies of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh and resist temptations when they assault us. And when we fall into sin as we most surely will, we can trust that Jesus has defeated the old evil foe and won the victory for us in the wilderness and on the cross. He has forgiven our sins, and we remain in His kingdom forever. Amen.