

BECOMING THE NEW HUMAN BEING THROUGH TESTING & TEMPTATION

Jerry Truex; March 13, 2011

Introduction

We are beginning the Lent Season. It began with Ash Wednesday (March 9), which initiated the 40 days of Lent (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter Sunday (April 24). The 40 days of Lent correspond to the 40 years of Israel testing in the wilderness and Jesus' 40 days of temptation.

During the 40 days of Lent, we attempt to become mindful of the testing and temptation in our own lives, so that we might act in solidarity with Christ and imitate his victory over temptation and, in that way, participate in Christ, grow in Christlikeness and in the power of the Spirit.

Today I will talk about three inter-related issues:

1. The nature and destiny of human beings
2. The obstacles we face in meeting our goals and purposes
3. How Christ is our model for victory in the Spirit

A. Our nature and destiny

When dealing with testing and temptations, it's important to remind ourselves of the ultimate goal of human life. If we want to move toward fulfilling the goal of life, we need to successfully manage times of testing and temptations.

1. Created in the Image of God

What is the image of God? About a year and a half ago, I gave a sermon about the image of God having three capacities.¹

First, the image of God refers to the capacity humans have to respond freely to God. To be fully human, involves responding (in obedience) to God's grace and calling. It is a choice we make. When we respond to God in obedience, we experience life more fully. This corresponds to the theological virtue of faith; faith does not allow us to give up on God.²

¹ Jerry Truex, "Sin as Alienation from God and Distortion of the Divine Image." Sept. 13, 2009. Mennonite Church of the Servant; <http://www.mcswichita.net/Sermons/Sermon-170-Sept-13-2009-Purgation-Sin-as-alienation-from-God-Jerry-Truex.pdf>.

² SIN as power and our false self deny we are created in the image of God and therefore deny we have responsibility to God.

Second, *the image of God* refers to co-existence. The image of God is both male and female (Gen. 1:26-27). Human existence is not individualistic, but communal. The bond between male and female symbolizes human co-existence. When we live in community with others, we experience life more fully. This corresponds to the theological virtue of love; love does not allow us to give up on others.³

Third, *the image of God* refers to openness to the divine future. This enables us to embrace whatever God brings to us. It enables us to endure hardship and suffering. Openness allows us to transcend limitations in anticipation of God’s coming reign. This corresponds to the theological virtue of hope; hope does not allow us to give up on our selves.⁴

2. Becoming the Likeness of God (*theōsis*)

According to the early church fathers, we are created in *the image* of God, but we have to work hard at acquiring the *likeness* of God.

Becoming like God is the goal or purpose of human life. Technically, this is called *theōsis* and it refers to the deification of human beings or becoming Christlike.

<p>2 Pet. 1:4. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become <u>partakers of the divine nature</u>, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (NASB)</p>	<p>2 Pet. 1:4. δι’ ὧν τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλματα δεδώρηται, ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε <u>θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως</u> ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθοράς.</p>
<p>Rom. 8:29. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be <u>conformed to the image</u> of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. (NRSV)</p>	<p>Rom. 8:29. ὅτι οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν <u>συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας</u> τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.</p>

B. Obstacles to our destiny

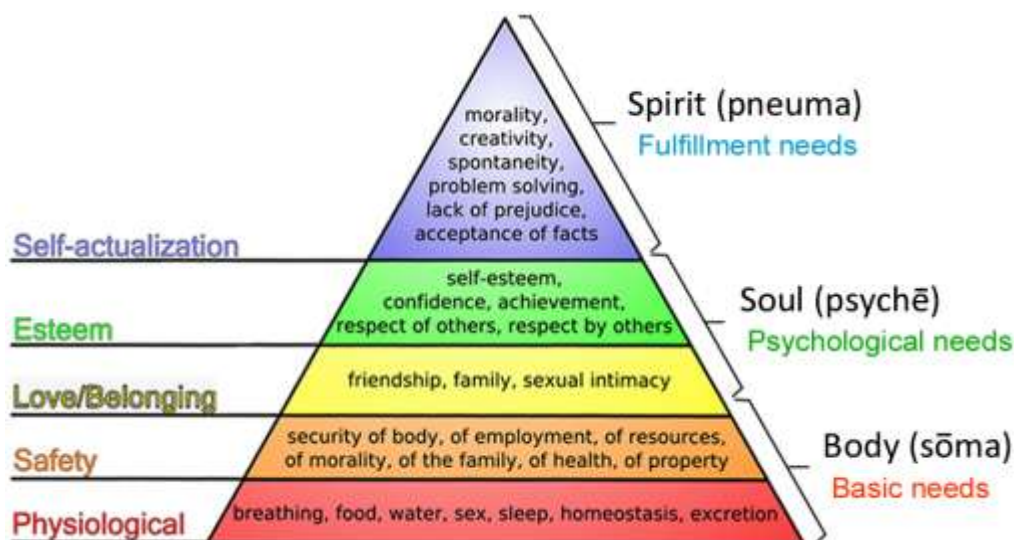
1. Human needs

Within the broad parameters of bearing *the image of God* and acquiring the *likeness of Christ*, it is helpful to look at human needs.

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), a famous American humanist psychologist, developed what is called the “Hierarchy of Needs” model. It is a model that helps conceptualize the variety and levels of needs we have.

³ SIN as power and our false self deny we are created in the image of God and therefore deny we have social responsibilities—responsibilities for the common good.

⁴ SIN as power and our false self deny we are created in the image of God and therefore deprive us of hope and the endurance that hope allows us to have.



Maslow's hierarchical model:

- Point out the levels and read the description for each
- Lower levels need to be met before upper levels
- When a need is mostly satisfied it no longer motivates

Maslow's hierarchy of needs roughly corresponds to the tripartite unitive nature of human beings, which I presented in an early sermon.⁵

However, Maslow's model can be critiqued. For example, if the human being is an integrated whole, then (contra Maslow) we work at meeting needs at multiple levels simultaneously. In addition, people can address higher level needs without having all of the lower level ones met. Consider the "starving artist" who works at self-actualization without having met all lower level needs. This suggests that the spirit can transcend lower level biological urges—the spirit is not restricted by the causal closure of biological processes. The spirit can act in freedom of what appears to be deterministic bodily mechanisms. For example, when we fast we suspend meeting our needs at the lower levels in order to exercise the high self.

2. The battleground for testing

It is at the level of human needs that testing and temptation appear in our lives. Human needs—and how we try to satisfy them—become the arena of temptation, the place of desires, disordered desires, and attachments—namely, the place of spiritual warfare.⁶

⁵ See Jerry Truex, "A Tri-Aspect Holism of Body, Soul, & Spirit," January 2, 2011, Mennonite Church of the Servant. <http://www.mcswichita.net/Sermons/Sermon-199-Humanity-Jan2-2011.pdf>. This tripartite model follows the work of Bernard Lonergan and Daniel Helminiack. See Daniel A. Helminiack, *The Human Core of Spirituality: Mind as Psyche and Spirit* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); *idem*, *Meditation Without Myth* (New York: Crossroad, 2005).

⁶ 2 Cor. 10:3-5. ³ We live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments ⁵ and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ." (NRSV)

a. Desires

God has given us legitimate needs and desires that God wants us to satisfy. And God has given us legitimate ways to meet those needs.

If we do it God’s way—respond to God in faith, hope, and love—within God’s timing, we experience satisfaction, fulfillment, joy, and serenity. We manifest the *image of God* and move toward realizing the *likeness of God*.

b. Disordered desires

But if we try to meet our needs outside of the scope of God’s provision—if we fail at faith, hope, and love—we develop disordered desires.

Disordered desires refer to attractions to any person, place, or thing—the fulfillment of such harms us and/or others. Disordered desires actually prevent us from satisfying our real needs. They delude us.

For example, a man needs sex, love, and belonging, but if he seeks prostitutes to meet those needs, it only prevents him from actually attaining real love and satisfaction.⁷

c. Attachments (addictions)

If disordered desires become habitual and there is a loss of self-control, they become attachments. Some people use the word “attachment” as a synonym of “love,” as in “I’m attached to my children.”

However, I am using the word “attachment” in the sense of clinging to thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that *aim* at self-gratification, self-protection, and self-promotion. As I’m defining it, attachments actually *prevent* one from “loving” others.

Attachments or addictions are not only harmful to ourselves and others, but we know we have attachments because we are unwilling or unable to give them up.⁸ There are three basic types of attachment—*security*, *sensation*, and *power*.⁹

Attachment	Associated Emotion	Consequences
Security	Fear, worry, anxiety, etc.	Preoccupation with food, shelter, or whatever you equate with personal security. Consciousness is dominated by trying to get “enough.” The mind can

⁷ The pursuit of disordered desires always violates the inner moral law or explicit divine commands. For example, the laws not to murder, steal, or covet.

⁸ Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1988) 25-6 identifies five characteristics of addiction: (1) tolerance, (2) withdrawal symptoms, (3) self-deception, (4) loss of willpower, and (5) distortion of attention.

⁹ Chart adapted from Ken Keys, *Handbook to Higher Consciousness* (Living Love Center, 1975) 59.

		always think of endless future possibilities to worry about.
Sensation	Frustration, depression, boredom, etc.	Preoccupied with finding more and better pleasurable sensations and activities, such as sex, food, music, drugs, etc. When we repetitively experiencing a sensation, we become satiated and bored.
Power	Anger, resentment, irritation, hostility, hate, etc.	Preoccupied with dominating and controlling people and situations, increasing your prestige, wealth, and status. Constant fear of loss. Our grasping for power stimulates a counter-attack from others and we are caught in defending and trying to control.

d. The consequences of attachments/addictions¹⁰

Attachments make us unhappy.

- Attachments *cause* negative, self-damaging emotions
- Anger when the world does not supply us with what we want
- Fear when we think we our security is threatened

Attachments feed our narcissistic ego (“the flesh”; Gal. 5:16ff)

- Turn us toward self-gratification, self-protection, self-promotion
- Turn us away from realizing the image of God in us.

Attachments prevent us from loving other people

- Ego sees itself as separate from all others, and knows nothing of any spiritual bond between humans, nature, or God

Attachments make us commit idolatry:

- Our ego takes control of our life and supplants our Higher Power
- Our ego searches for satisfaction in things other than God and what God gives

C. Christ, our model and destiny

The NT presents us with an example of how to successfully manage testing and temptation. That model is Christ. Luke’s narrative of Jesus’ temptations provides that model.

1. The temptations of Jesus

Luke links Jesus’ temptations with the two great temptations or testings in the OT.¹¹

¹⁰ The following is from a previous sermon, Jerry Truex, “SIN as Power and Attachment,” Sept. 20, 2009. Mennonite Church of the Servant. <http://www.mcswichita.net/Sermons/Sermon-171-Sept-20-2009-Purgation-SIN-as-Power-and-Attachment.pdf>

¹¹ The following is a modification of a sermon by Jerry Truex, “The Myth of Jesus’ Temptations: The True Self and the False Self,” May 17, 2008. Mennonite Church of the Servant. <http://www.mcswichita.net/Sermons/Sermon-132-May-17-2008-TheMythofJesusTemptations-Luke4.1-14.pdf>

The temptations of Jesus parallel the temptation of Adam:

- Adam was called the "son of God" (Lk 3:38) and so was Jesus (Lk 3:22).
- Both Jesus and Adam were confronted by the Devil and the Serpent.

The testing of Jesus also parallels the testing of Israel in the wilderness:

- Israel was led by God; Jesus was led by the Spirit.
- Israel was called "the son of God" (Exod. 4:22) and so was Jesus (Lk 3:22).
- Both were in the desert: Israel for forty years, Jesus for forty days.
- Both were times of testing.
- In addition, Jesus' three quotations from Scripture are from Deuteronomy, part of Moses' instruction to Israel while they were in the desert.

In this way, Luke's story recapitulates the stories of Adam and Israel. But the difference is that Jesus is successful, whereas Adam and Israel failed. In this way, Jesus is presented as the New Adam/Humanity and Faithful Israel.

2. A story of non-attachment and spiritual power

SPIRIT POWER	¹ Jesus, <u>full of the Holy Spirit</u> , returned from the Jordan and was <u>led by the Spirit</u> in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.
1ST TEST/WORD	³ THE DEVIL said to him, ' <u>If you are the Son of God</u> , command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' ⁴ JESUS answered him, ' <u>It is written</u> , "One does not live by bread alone."
2ND TEST/WORD	⁵ Then THE DEVIL led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ <u>If you</u> , then, <u>will worship me</u> , it will all be yours.' ⁸ JESUS answered him, ' <u>It is written</u> , "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '
3RD TEST/WORD	⁹ Then THE DEVIL took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ' <u>If you are the Son of God</u> , throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", ¹¹ and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." ' ¹² JESUS answered him, ' <u>It is said</u> , "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '
SPIRIT POWER	¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. ¹⁴ Then Jesus, <u>filled with the power of the Spirit</u> , returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

3. First Temptation (3-4)

³ THE DEVIL said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'

⁴ JESUS answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."

a. What is the appeal?

The appeal is to meet legitimate needs (security & sensation). Jesus was hungry and needs to eat. It was an appeal to satisfy legitimate bodily desires. It is the temptation to put personal bodily needs ahead of all else.

Unfortunately, when we are UNWILLING to GIVE UP satisfying bodily desires—at least momentarily—the desire take hold of us and controls us. We can become attached and addicted.¹²

If we become attached, we develop ANXIETY and FEAR that we might not be able to satisfy our desires. Anxiety and fear leads to conflict within oneself and with others. When an addiction becomes overwhelming, people sacrifice jobs, health, friends, and family in order TO GET what they think they MUST have.

b. How does Jesus respond?

Jesus quotes scripture (Deut 8:36). The quotation indicates that human life is more than physical subsistence.

- Jesus is willing to GIVE UP meeting basic needs for a period of time.
- Jesus was not attached to bodily desires.
- Jesus has a Higher Power and Center of control.

The story tells us that humans have access to a Higher Power—a Higher Center of control—than bodily desires. Like Jesus, we have the potential to transcend ourselves.

We can GIVE UP pleasures and even GIVE UP satisfying certain bodily needs—when the time calls for it. When we do, we experience self-transcendence. We discover Something Higher within us.

4. Second Temptation (5-8)

⁵ Then THE DEVIL led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' ⁸ JESUS answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

a. What is the appeal?

The appeal is to power and greed. It is the temptation to grasp for power and control. This temptation focuses on outer relationships and political power.

¹² Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1988) identifies five essential characteristics of addiction: (1) tolerance, (2) withdrawal symptoms, (3) self-deception, (4) loss of willpower, and (5) distortion of attention (25-26).

There are legitimate and beneficial uses of power. But in this case, Jesus refuses an illegitimate source and use of authority. Jesus is WILLING to give up power at the right time. Jesus was not attached to power. He did not crave power.

Unfortunately, addiction to power leads to trying to dominate and control people. People addicted to power will tend to develop anger, resentment, and hostility whenever their power is threatened. Addiction to power is one of the most dangerous and harmful addictions. Wars and genocides are perpetrated by power-addictions.

b. How does Jesus respond?

Jesus quotes scripture (Deut 6:13). The quotation indicates that service is owed only to God alone. Jesus implies that power outside of the service of God is illegitimate. Power at any cost, and by any means, is of the Devil.

The willingness to GIVE UP power is to recognize the HIGHER POWER.

- It is willingness to let go.
- It is accept of reality as it is.
- Acceptance means seeing things as they are, rather than as you think they should be.
- Acceptance is openness to what is here.
- The sense of struggle is released.

When you are willing to release power—whatever power you think you have—notice that your awareness expands. You can sense that God Is. God is in control. You can relax. It doesn't mean you stop doing things; but it mean you release the outcomes to God.

5. Third Temptation (9-12)

⁹ Then THE DEVIL took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", ¹¹ and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." ' ¹² JESUS answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

a. What is the appeal?

The appeal is to special protection and status with God. It is the temptation to presume you have special status with God.

For example, it's when we think God will give us special exemption or protection when we do stupid things—drive too fast, eat or drink too much, cheat and steal. God will not magically protect you from your own harmful behaviors.

b. How does Jesus respond?

Jesus quotes scripture (Deut 6:16). Jesus will not force God's hand or presume he knows God's will.

- Jesus' response is an act of humility.
- Humility is an act of self-transcendence.
- It is to restrain self-centeredness.
- It is openness and awareness that I am connected to a Divine Reality, who is infinitely more than me.

D. Summary

1. We are created to *manifest the image of God* and called to *realize the likeness of Christ*. In a nutshell, that is the purpose of human beings.
2. Our greatest obstacle to attaining our purposes as human beings comes from the temptation to meet our needs outside the grace and provision of God and that, in turn, can lead us to attachment/addiction and self-destruction.
3. Christ is the model for dealing with temptation
 - He submitted to the Spirit of God
 - He was non-attached to meeting physical, power, and security needs independent of God
 - As a result, he left the spiritual battlefield in the power of the Spirit
4. When we imitate Christ by submitting to the Spirit and knowing Scripture, we can realize the New Humanity of Christ within ourselves.