

Testing God  
June 2, 2013

When I was growing up we would make several trips a year to see my dad's sister in Harrisonburg, Virginia. And often on those trips we would go downtown and shop. This was before the days of the big box stores and the outlying shopping centers.

On one of these trips we parked in a municipal, that means city owned, parking lot, put our money in the meter and went shopping. When we got back there was a ticket on the window. Dad went somewhere to see about the ticket and they told him it was illegal to back into the spaces. There were no signs in the lot saying you couldn't back in. But all the locals knew it was the law. If we had known, we wouldn't have backed in either. But we didn't know. It would have been great if someone had seen us parking and told us the way we were doing it was illegal.

One of the things we do here on Sundays is help each other know what sin is. We do this so we can turn away, or repent, of our sins. This morning's sermon is about discovering a sin that you may not be aware of. My goal this morning is to help you know of this sin so that if you are guilty of it, you can turn away from it's practice. Jesus was tempted by this sin. We'll look at that passage in a moment, but let me introduce it with a question.

Have you ever thought about when Jesus learned who He was? We don't know when or how Jesus learned who He was. We don't know when Jesus learned that He was the Messiah and was going to die on a cross.

I don't believe Jesus knew this when He was born. I don't think he could speak fluent Hebrew right after His birth. He had to learn to talk like all the other kids. He had to learn to walk like all the other babies. He had to learn to ride a bike with training wheels just like I did. He had to learn the history of the Israelites. He had to learn right from wrong. He had to learn the carpentry business from Joseph. I don't think He was born knowing any of these things.

That means that at some point during His life, Jesus had to be told who He was. At some time God told Jesus that He was the Messiah and that the Messiah was supposed to be crucified for the sins of all mankind. We don't know when God told Jesus this. It may have been when Jesus was a child, or a teen, or an adult. Some of it He learned by age 12. Probably most of it He knew before His baptism by John the Baptist. God told Jesus that He would have this teaching ministry, pointing people to the arrival of the Kingdom of God. When the time was right, God told Jesus to go and be baptized by John the Baptist, in affirmation of who John was and what he was teaching. Jesus obeyed. He went and was baptized by John, and witnessed a miracle.

**Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV)** *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

That was pretty cool. If that had happened at my ordination service, it would have been super cool. Not only did Jesus witness a miracle, but the miracle was about Him. This confirmed what God had been telling Jesus about who He, Jesus, was, and what He would do.

This was a super cool miracle. But considering what lay ahead for Jesus, it would be natural for Him, or any of us, to want more evidence that God would watch over Him along the way. Before Jesus got to the cross there were going to be other dangerous situations He would find Himself in. For most of the three teaching years He would be considered as a dangerous person by the religious leaders. They would put a contract out on Him. They would attempt to kill Him.

So before launching out into this dangerous ministry, it would be helpful if God would confirm His presence with Jesus. Because this would be a natural desire, this is why the devil tempted Jesus to try to get that kind of confirmation from God.

Over the 40 day period after He was baptized, Jesus was in the wilderness, fasting, praying, preparing Himself for His teaching ministry. And the devil appears to Him, maybe many times, but at least once that we know of. The devil tried to get Jesus to sin. Of course, he didn't say that. He never says to anybody, "Let me see if I can get you to sin." But that's what he was trying to accomplish.

**Matthew 4:5-6 (NIV)** *Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "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."*

The devil said to Jesus, "If you are going to put your life on the line, you are going to have to be sure of God. Are you? Are you sure of God, Jesus? Seek a confirmation of His faithfulness to you. Jump off this pinnacle and see if He will catch you, like the scriptures say He will."

**Matthew 4:7 (NIV)**

*Jesus answered him, "It is... written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Jesus doesn't buy what the devil is selling. Jesus knows that jumping off would be a sin. Did you know that jumping off would be a sin? You might have thought that jumping off would be crazy or foolish. But did you know jumping off would be a sin?

Why is jumping off a sin? Did not the scriptures say the angels would catch Him? Not exactly. The passage the devil quoted, from Psalm 91, said that the angels wouldn't let Him stub His toe. It did not say they would catch Him if He jumped off the temple. The Psalm was written to encourage Jesus that God would watch over Him and protect Him. But a promise isn't a command. Psalm 91 never commands Jesus to do something dangerous in order to prove God's faithfulness. A promise isn't a command. Nor should it be read as one.

Jumping off the temple would be testing God. And testing God, as Jesus reminds the devil, is a sin. Testing God is a sin.

Now let me ask you a question. Have you been testing God? Have you been testing God? Because if you have, it is a sin you need to repent of. If you've been testing God, then you need to quit!

But maybe you don't know what it means to test God. What does it mean to "test God"? To answer that question, we need to look at several Old Testament passages, back to where someone did test God. Moses spoke of testing God. In the Old Testament, after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses says something about testing God.

**Deuteronomy 6:16 (NIV)** *Do not test Yahweh\* your God as you did at Massah.*

Where was Massah, and what happened there? Massah was somewhere in the Sinai wilderness. If you are familiar with Israelite history, you may remember the incident in which Moses struck the rock to bring forth water for the people to drink. What you may not remember is that the place was called "Mas-SAW", which means "testing". Let's look at that episode. Here we see the people testing God in two ways.

**Exodus 17:1-7 (NIV)** *The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as Yahweh commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.*

*So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."*

*Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put Yahweh to the test?"*

*But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"*

*Then Moses cried out to Yahweh, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."*

*Yahweh answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."*

*So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested Yahweh saying, "Is Yahweh among us or not?"*

So the Israelites tested God at this place. They were trying to back God into a corner. They were trying to get God to do what they wanted God to do. In short, **To test God is to try to manipulate God.**

We are all familiar with techniques of manipulation. We all used them on our parents. We who are parents have seen our kids try them on us. Even toddlers, preschoolers do this. It comes natural to them. They use fake crying, screaming, affection, pouting, intentional disobedience where they dare us to punish them, and trying to play one parent off against another saying things like, "Well dad said I could". They do all these things to try to get their way. It is a power struggle with the parents. They are testing you. They are challenging your authority.

In that same way we can sin by testing God. When we try to manipulate God to do what we want, we are testing God. We are challenging His authority. And this is sin.

The Israelites tested God at Marah in two ways. First, **they tested God by their complaining.** They complained and grumbled because they were thirsty. They failed to appreciate God's provision and believe He would meet their needs. Now I've been dry and thirsty before. I don't know what its like to be really dry and thirsty in the desert.

But I DO know that God has always met my needs. God has met my every need, every time I have been in need and called out to Him in faith. He has always met my need, not always like I thought it needed to be met or as soon as I wanted it to be met. But God has ALWAYS met my need. That I know.

The same was true of the Israelites. Up to this point in their recent history they had experienced dozens of miracles. They had been freed from their slavery in Egypt. They had plundered the

Egyptians for gold and silver and clothes. They had ample evidence of God's provision of food, water, and protection in the wilderness. And yet they dared to grumble against Moses and God.

Have you been testing God like this? Have you been grumbling about God's provision for you? Have you been complaining because you don't have all the comforts that others have? Have you been sulking because you don't have all the toys that others have? Have you been lacking in zeal towards God in worship because you have been suffering in illness, or financial uncertainty, or some other human ill? Why are you testing God? It is time you repented.

They were testing God with their complaining. Secondly, **they tested God by expecting God to prove His presence with them by giving them water.**

They were saying, "Is Yahweh really among us? Is Yahweh really with us? If God is really among us, let Him prove it by giving us water, right now.

Maybe you have heard a variation of this one from your kids. Have they ever said to you something like this: "If you really love me you'll \_\_\_\_\_". That is manipulation. That's what the Israelites were doing to God.

We see a variation of this technique when some of the Pharisees ask Jesus to do a miracle. They asked this despite all the miracles Jesus had already done. There were plenty of people who could testify to that. Some of them were even Pharisees.

No, they wanted something else. They wanted an on-demand miracle. They didn't want a Jesus-initiated miracle. They wanted a Pharisee-initiated miracle. In this they wanted Jesus to submit to their authority instead of submitting to His.

Perhaps you are guilty of this too. We can test God by demanding God prove Himself to us. That is what the devil was tempting Jesus to do. He wanted Jesus to demand proof from God that He was really with Jesus. The proof would be to catch Him when He jumped off the temple.

Maybe you have been demanding some kind of proof from God. Maybe you have been demanding some kind of proof that God is real, or that Jesus is from God, or that Jesus died for your sins. Listen, God has already given us enough proof to believe all of these things. The reality is that if you don't believe, it is because you don't WANT to believe. You don't want to submit to the authority of God. And God knows that. That's why He doesn't respond to your manipulation.

Now here is what any test of God does. Here is why testing God is a sin. **The reason testing God (trying to manipulate God) is a sin, is that when you do this you are changing the nature of the relationship.**

Trying to get God to do what you want is to change the very nature of your relationship to God. The nature of our relationship to God is creator over created. We live under the authority of God. We are to submit our lives to Him as our creator. He created us for His own purposes.

**Creator**    versus    **created**  
**created**                      **Creator**

When you act to manipulate God, you are trying to change that relationship to one of created over creator. You want God to submit to you. You are trying to control God. And that, of course, is sin.

So, are you testing God? Are trying to manipulate God? Then turn away from this sin today. Confess this to God and commit to Him your desire to quit this behavior. Ask Him to remind you of it when you slip into this sin again.

( Invitation )

If you are not yet a Christian let me ask you why you are holding back? Could it be that you aren't ready to submit your life to God?

Have you been telling God to prove Himself to you? Could it be that your request is just a stall tactic? The Bible declares that God has already given us enough evidence to believe He exists. Maybe you pretend that this evidence is not good enough for you because you don't intend to submit your life to God. If you named a miracle God could do to prove Himself to you, and He did it, I don't believe you would then submit yourself to Him. You would just find a new excuse not to become a Christian.

**Instead of asking God to prove Himself to you, it is you who are to prove yourself to God.**

If you fully intend to submit your life to God once you become convinced that God is real, then start now. Think of this: if God is real, then the proper way to relate to Him is in humble gratitude for your life, and submissive obedience.

Come to God like that as you wait for confirmation. Don't demand anything of God. Show God your desire to serve Him once you know He is real. Why should God reveal Himself to you if you are not going to submit to Him if He does? The way to find out if God is real is to adopt NOW the proper attitude towards God. Confess to God the true state of your heart.

If you are ready to believe He exists and has sent you a Savior, Jesus Christ. Then confess your belief in Jesus today, receiving Him as your Savior and turning your life over to Him as your Lord.

Maybe one of these prayers well represents your heart today, and the prayer you should pray:

**Sample Prayers:**

God, I look at the earth, from the rhythm of the oceans to the complexity of the atom, from the tiny microorganisms to the mighty whales, from the human brain to the simple water cycle, and I see a master designer at work. I believe You are real. I submit myself to You now. I am ready to live fully for You, whatever that might entail. Teach me as I live for You.

Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner against God. I know my sin deserves death and hell. I need a rescuer, a savior. I believe You are the Savior I need because You died for my sins. I now receive You, as my Savior and turn my life over to You as my Lord.

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\*NOTE: "Yahweh" is God's personal name. See the introduction to your Bible translation for more information.