

# OpenTheo

## No Compromise With The Devil - Part 1

February 28, 2021



### **The Bible for Today with John Stott** - Premier

Whilst Christ-likeness should be the goal of every Christian, John Stott shows us how the Holy Spirit is transforming us into the image of Christ.

### **Transcript**

[Music] One day my friends were going to be like Jesus. Christ-like-ness should be the goal of every Christian. Meanwhile, again as we've been reminded, the Holy Spirit is transforming us from one degree of glory to another into the image of Christ.

[Music] Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stott. Time magazine ranked John Stott as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. During his lifetime he impacted the evangelical church on every continent and was author of the landmark Lausanne Covenant on Evangelism.

John Stott's ministry was centered on five priorities - prayer, expository preaching, regular evangelism, careful follow-up, and systematic training of new leaders. But for all his global influence, he had an unassuming demeanor preferring to be known as Uncle John and living in a small apartment above a gallery of a rectory in London. Indeed, the rectory of all souls Langen Place which was his home church for almost 60 years.

We are privileged to be marking John Stott's centenary by bringing you just some of his timeless teaching. Being a Christian in a contemporary world is not easy. Being a Christian requires us to be Christ-like, to be imitators of Christ.

But this can be difficult with so many temptations around us. For us to overcome temptation there can be no compromise with the devil and that's our subject for today. Already our whole service this morning has prepared us for the beginning of a Lenten series of sermons entitled The Imitation of Christ.

The title of course is borrowed from that spiritual classic which all of us know many of us will have read by Thomas O'Campus, The Imitation of Christ. You may know that this was a product of a particular artistic movement in the 14th and 15th centuries on the

continent associated with a group of Christians called the Brethren of the Common Life. They formed communities what today we might call communes for the deepening of spiritual diversion.

They gave themselves to meditation, to prayer, to self-discipline and they were also active in manual labor and in good works of charity in the community. Even jellical Christians for many centuries have had an ambivalent attitude to Thomas O'Campus' book The Imitation of Christ. On the one hand you've only got to read it to see that it breathes the spirit of great love and devotion to God and to his son Jesus Christ.

But on the other as you meditate in the book we miss some of the authentic notes of the gospel. There is more emphasis in the book on Jesus the model than there is on Jesus the Savior. There is more emphasis therefore on the exemplary life that he lived than on the attuning death that he died.

And the way of holiness that Thomas O'Campus expands depends rather on struggle and on self-denial and on sacrifice. Then it does on the new birth, on union with Jesus Christ and on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. So one has to say that as you read the book there is much in it that moves the heart and enlightens the mind and yet there is something that leaves one dissatisfied.

Nevertheless I would like to say that it's a great pity if any of us for that reason have shied away from the topic the imitation of Christ because the New Testament contains a great deal on this particular theme. "Follow me," Jesus said, and that includes at least the following of his example. "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ," said the apostle Paul, describing himself as an imitator of Christ.

And God's eternal purpose as we've been seeing in the service earlier today is to conform us to the image of his Son Jesus Christ. One day my friends were going to be like Jesus. Christ's likeness should be the goal of every Christian.

And meanwhile again as we've been reminded the Holy Spirit is transforming us from one degree of glory to another into the image of Christ. So our theme is an exciting one. It's one that should concern all of us the imitation of Christ.

How can you and I become more like Jesus Christ? And what does that mean in the practical concrete realities of everyday living? So we're going to consider some of the ways in which the example of Jesus is set before us in the New Testament, but he is the man Christ Jesus. And as we look at him we see not only what God is like, we see also what man and woman ought to be like. We see in the man Christ Jesus what it means to be a human being.

And that's what I want to be. That's what you want to be. It's not an exaggeration to say that to be Christian and to be human are interchangeable terms.

Well the first aspect of the imitation of Christ that we're going to look at today I've entitled no compromise with the devil. I'd like to ask you to turn to a text or maybe we shall not spend too long on it. It comes in the first letter of John at the end of the Bible, chapter 3 and verse 2 and 3. You'll find the three letters of John just before the revelation at the end, chapter 3 of the first letter, verse 2. Beloved we are God's children now.

It does not yet appear what we shall be. We are His children, what we shall be is not yet clear. But we do know this so there much is obscure about our eternal destiny.

We do know this that when Jesus appears we shall be like Him. We shall see Him as He is. Total Christ likeness is our destiny.

And verse 3, everyone who thus hopes in Christ who has this confidence that Christ is coming again, that we're going to see Him when He comes and we're going to be like Him when we see Him. Everyone who has this confidence in Jesus Christ purifies Himself as Jesus is pure. In other words, when we realize that our final destiny is Christ-likeness, this is a tremendous stimulus towards Christ-likeness now on earth.

We want to be pure as He is pure. So the first aspect of Christ-likeness we're going to think about today is purity, righteousness, holiness, whatever you like to call it. We are to be pure as He is pure.

Now as an illustration of the purity of Jesus, we're going to get back to the beginning of His public ministry and we're going to take a fresh look at His temptations in the wilderness of Judea. So I'd like to ask you to turn from that text to the passage we're really going to look at at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew and chapter 4. It's appropriate for Lent because it's been traditional in many churches and many years to think about the temptations of Jesus when Lent begins. And I trust that we can learn from His example in the wilderness of Judea how to confront the devil, how to gain the victory over the devil, how to be pure as He is pure and how not to compromise with the devil.

And I think we can learn these things as we analyze together the temptations of the Lord portrayed in Matthew 4. Now the first thing that shines out of this whole story is Jesus' love for God. His total devotion to God His Father, His total God-centeredness. And we cannot understand how He was able to resist the devil until and unless we see it against the background of His total devotion to God.

For these two things inevitably belong together. I want to invite you to think about this with me in order to grasp it. We need to be clear in our minds that the temptations of Jesus were real and fierce.

This incontact with the devil in the wilderness of Judea was no mock battle. It was no

pretense incontinence. It was a real and a grueling experience for the Lord Jesus.

But in becoming man, Jesus among other things had laid aside His immunity to temptation. God where tell cannot be tempted. But Jesus was tempted.

He made Himself vulnerable to the approaches of the devil. Of course He did not sinned and misunderstand me. But He laid aside His immunity to temptation.

The temptations were real. His vulnerability to the devil is very evident in this story. And let us consider how grueling the temptation was.

Jesus seems to have gone straight from the waters of Jordan to the wilderness of Judea, straight from the baptism to the temptation, straight from an experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him like a dove to the most vicious counter-attack of the enemy. And as He came into the wilderness of Judea, God the Father's words, baptismal words, was still without doubt ringing in His ears. The words He'd heard when He was baptized, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." Now, there's our words of enormous significance because by them God deliberately united two Old Testament strands of prophetic expectation regarding the Messiah and He applied them both to Jesus.

The first in Psalm 2, this is my Son or that my Son, indicates that as God's Son He will reign over the nations in glory. The second in whom I'm well pleased is taken from Isaiah 42 and depicts the Messiah, not as God's Son, but as God's servant, the servant of whom we read in these passages in Isaiah who would suffer and die for the people. Sir, the voice of God at the baptism, proclaimed the double destiny of Jesus.

First that He would reign as God's Son, but before that that He would suffer and die as God's servant. Indeed, in bringing these two together in the baptismal voice, it was made plain that Jesus would only enter into His glory through suffering. But before the echo of the Father's voice had died down in the ears and in the mind of Jesus, the devil challenged it.

"This is my Son," the voice of God had said at the baptism, "if you are the Son of God, lead the devil." Throwing doubt upon the very thing which God had declared Him to be at His baptism, "In you I am well pleased," said God, indicated that as my servant, your role is to suffer and to die. But surely the devil said that isn't necessary. All the world can be yours if instead of suffering in obedience to the will of God, you bow down and obey me instead.

Do you see then how the temptation of Jesus struck at the very roots of His personhood, struck at the very roots of His self-awareness, as had been given Him at the baptism. The devil sought to rupture the union that God had made between His person and His mission, between His sufferings and His glory, and the devil tried to precipitate Jesus into an identity crisis about who He was and what He'd come into the world to do. And the

devil offered to Jesus a shortcut by compromise.

He offered Him glory without suffering. He offered Him world conquest without pain. And behind that fearful temptation, so radical that it struck at the very roots of who He was and what He'd come into the world to do, Jesus detected something even worse than that.

For what He's playing as you meditate on the temptations of Jesus is that the temptation to doubt Himself, to doubt who He was and what He'd come to do, to doubt His person and to doubt His mission, behind the temptation to doubt Himself was a temptation to doubt God and to disagree with God as well. Now this is clear from each of the temptations when you look at them in the light of how Christ replied to them, because how Jesus replied to the temptation, of course indicates how He understood what the temptation was. Now when He was tempted to turn stone into bread, Jesus said that it threatened in Scripture that man doesn't live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

And in the context in Deuteronomy from which that word is taken, it means by obedience to every word that comes out of the mouth of God. Man lives not just by bread, by food, he lives by obedience to the word of God. So in that temptation Jesus detected the temptation to disobey God.

Then the temptation to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple was a temptation to tempt God, because Jesus replied that it's written, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God, you shall not force His hand, you shall not put Him to the test. I am going to trust God, I am not going to force Him to display His power on my behalf. I trust Him already." And then third of the temptation to fall down and worship the devil is, of course, it is a temptation to discern God altogether.

And Jesus replied that it's written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, not discern Him." So you see Jesus saw these temptations, as temptations relating to His attitude to God. They were temptations to disobey God, to tempt God, to disown God, to doubt God. And what shines out for me from this whole narrative is the fundamental God-centeredness of Jesus, the clarity with which He saw the issues, that to love God, He must resist the devil.

And in a sense, one may say, however grueling the temptation was, it wasn't really difficult for him to say, "Big God Satan," because with this limpid clarity, he saw within each temptation an insinuation that he must doubt God, disobey God, disown God, that Jesus was so focused upon God that it was inconceivable that he should do so. Now, when you and I put ourselves in the position of Jesus, we who are victims of the relativity of modern culture. I think you'd agree with me, we would have reacted in that wilderness of Judea quite differently.

And indeed, we do react quite differently today. We don't see things in black and white like that. We don't see things in God and devil terms like that.

In other words, we don't have the clarity of moral judgment that is so evident in the life of Jesus. What we do is to see everything in infinite gradations of compromise. Why we say the devil's got a point, you know.

I mean, there is something in what he is saying, isn't there? It's really rather clever what he's saying. I mean, it's partly true and partly false, and immediately we begin to compromise. We say that there is a prudence in his offer.

There is a worldly wisdom in his offer. There is a business-like, practical attractiveness about his proposition. Why he's offering the whole world.

Of course, it's on condition that we fall down and worship him, but he would be rather nice to have the whole world. He's attractive. And so we begin to compromise.

No compromise with the devil. That's the first thing I see. This love for God.

This total devotion to God, to his will and to his purpose, that was at the root of Jesus' refusal to compromise with the devil. Now, the second thing we turn from his love for God to his submission to Scripture, because what we need to ask ourselves now is it's all very well to say Jesus loved God, but how did he know the implications of his love for God in the concrete realities of his temptation? Love can be a deliciously vague feeling. So how did his love for God lay upon him such precise ethical obligations that he saw the choice before him and made the right decisions? And the answer to that is because his mind was soaked in Scripture and because his will was submissive to the Scripture in which his mind was soaked.

So he could say in verse 10, "Began Satan, because it stands written. You shall worship the Lord your God." You see, what stood written in Scripture was what showed him how his love for God should be expressed. He believed that the living God, his heavenly Father, from whom his being was derived, had spoken, had revealed his will in speech.

And Jesus believed that this divine speech had been preserved and recorded in Scripture. And Jesus believed that what Scripture said, God said, Jesus drew no distinction whatever between the will of his Father in heaven and the written word of Scripture. He identified the two.

What Scripture said, God said, what God said, Scripture said. It was in Scripture that he discovered the will of God and found the word of God. And he drew no distinction between the two to obey this word, was to obey the Father who had spoken the word.

And it was inconceivable to Jesus that he should love God and disregard Scripture. Now that personal submission of Christ's Scripture, the personal submission of the living word

of God to the written word of God is immensely impressive. The incarnate Son of God voluntarily adopted a position of subordination to Scripture.

Now this brethren is the first and fundamental reason why Christian people today should be submissive to Scripture as well. The cavalier attitude to the Bible, adopted by many, even by leaders in the visible church today, I venture to say, is incompatible with true Christian discipleship because it is to disagree with Jesus.

[Music] You've been listening to the first part of a message by John Stott, which he'll continue at the same time next week, showing how there can be no compromise with the devil.

Being obedient to the word of God as Christ was to his Father will enable us to know what Christ thinks of the church. That's the title of a best-selling book by John Stott, which you could benefit from reading. It's one of many books he read during his lifetime, and you can find out more, including how to purchase one for yourself by visiting [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this at other ministries, John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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