

When is it wrong to meet a legitimate need?

Written by Bill Perkins

The Lord's first temptation was straightforward: "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread" (Luke 4:3, niv). Satan's question implied Jesus might *not* be the Son of God. It prodded him to prove his identity and satisfy his hunger by performing a miracle.

There's nothing wrong with eating bread when you're hungry. And it wouldn't have been wrong for Jesus to turn stones into bread and eat them—unless in doing so he acted apart from his Father. That's what Satan wanted Jesus to do: meet a legitimate need apart from the Father. It's also what he wants us to do with our physical need for food, clothing, shelter, sex, love, and companionship.

Meeting Them Sinfully

Certainly, these need to be met if we're going to be healthy. But meeting them sinfully is inappropriate. Why? Because when we choose to act in violation of the Lord's commands we are acting apart from God.

Bend the Rules a Bit?

Jesus made it clear that our need to obey God's word is greater than our need to obey the promptings of our desires. While we nod our head in agreement, living out that reality proves harder. When we feel a legitimate need and want to meet it, is it okay to bend the rules a bit? Remember, we're talking about a legitimate need here. Isn't that what Satan wanted Jesus to believe.

That's why he told the tempter, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, niv). In other words, although Jesus could have met his physical needs apart from God, it was more important to act in communion with him.

The World

I believe the apostle John, one of the Lord's closest disciples, was commenting on the temptation of Jesus when he said, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15-16, niv).

The "world" to which John refers is a system that leaves God out. The three worldly cravings he noted line up with the three temptations of Jesus. The "lust of the flesh" refers to our human appetites that seek gratification in ungodly ways.

I think John meant that when we seek to satisfy these appetites inappropriately, it's not the Father acting through us—he has no desire for evil and would never seek it through us. Because Jesus never acted independent of the Father, he resisted the devil's temptation by staying aligned with God and his word. As odd as it may seem, there is joy in following his example.