

After someone has been arrested on suspicion of committing a crime, a prosecuting attorney must decide whether to file charges. He or she determines whether there is sufficient cause by reviewing information contained in the arresting officer’s complaint. The prosecutor looks in particular at the quality of evidence presented—and at other factors surrounding the incident. He or she may increase, reduce, or dismiss the charges brought by the police. In some cases, the prosecutor may request more information from law enforcement or investigators before making a final decision.

In most circumstances, prosecutors enjoy broad discretion and affect the trajectory and outcome of criminal cases more than other actors in the justice system do. *

So imagine that you have been arrested, caught in the act of committing a crime, and the prosecuting attorney handling your case wants more than justice—they want to absolutely destroy you. They’re out to damage your psyche and make you question if there’s any hope for good in you at all. Does that sound extreme, or like a weird episode of Law and Order? Yeah, maybe. But on a spiritual level, it’s also true. You have an enemy whose method is to increase the charges he brings against you until you snap. That enemy is Satan, and accusation is his specialty.

For a time, as we heard in Job, Satan, the accuser, could stand before God in the court of heaven and accuse people of their sin. Picture him as the prosecuting attorney standing before the Judge and saying, "So-and-so deserves a death sentence, and I have the list of sins right here. Therefore, condemn him." On account of Christ, however, Satan has lost that forum. However, the devil can still accuse people of their sin in their own conscience so that they feel that God could not love them or forgive them.

However, before he can accuse you of sin, you have to have sins to be accused of; this is why the Accuser tempts you to sin, so that he can gain leverage for his accusations against you. And this is why he's at a huge disadvantage in the Gospel lesson, because Jesus is without sin. Therefore, the devil has no accusation to make unless he can somehow convince Jesus give in to temptation.

So the devil tempts for those forty days. He tries out those temptations of physical appetites, wooing Jesus to turn the stones into bread and fill His aching stomach. But this is against the Father's Word and will for His Son in the wilderness, so Jesus refuses the devil's suggestion. The devil tempts Him with power, promising to give Him all the kingdoms of the world without the suffering on the cross; this shows how weak the devil's hand is, trying to dish out the lie that Jesus needs his help for power. And the devil tempts Jesus to pride, telling Him to test His Father by throwing Himself off the temple; instead of all this suffering Servant stuff, wouldn't it be a lot more gratifying to make God jump out and save you? But once again, the sinless Son of God says no. He is not about self-satisfaction or power or pride; He has come for humble self-sacrifice and servanthood.

The Accuser leaves as a loser for all of his efforts. Jesus has resisted all temptation and has no sins to be accused of, so there's no use in hanging around Him. The devil departs "until an opportune time." Three years later, he'll still have no ammunition against God's Son, but he'll opt for Plan B: He'll accuse the consciences of sinners so badly that they'll want the Savior destroyed. The Liar will induce them to speak all sorts of lies so that the Son of God is put to death.

You know, of course, that the devil loses on Calvary. Talk about irony: Satan wanted Jesus dead, gone, out of the picture. His mission always is to steal, kill, and destroy. In God's deep, secret wisdom, He turned Satan's tactics inside out. In other words, Jesus' death on the cross was not a tragic mistake. It was checkmate. It was not a fatal error; it was the fulfillment of a sacrificial strategy, drawn up by the triune God from the beginning, before there was a world to save. At the climactic battle of Calvary, your Savior Jesus Christ is the clear winner, and His victory is demonstrated three days later when He rises from the dead.

But do not skip quickly past this Temptation in the Wilderness; for already here, Jesus deals the Accuser quite the blow. By resisting temptation there, He remains the perfect, sinless Sacrifice; this means that, while His crucifixion hasn't yet taken place, the devil's defeat is already secured.

Hear this Good News from the Temptation in the Wilderness: Jesus perfectly resisted temptation, and He did so for you. He did this so that, along with the forgiveness of sins, He could give you the credit for His perfect resistance to temptation.

In other words, imagine a scene where the devil gets to accuse you before God one more time. "God, do You see those people at St. Mark? They're a sinful bunch--sinful enough that they don't deserve Your favor or help. Therefore, because of their sin and on the basis of Your Law, I demand that you condemn them." It's a frightening prospect, for God's Law declares that we deserve such condemnation; however, God's Law is only half the story. So, this would be the Lord's response: "I see those people at St. Mark, and I tell you this: My Son has died their death. I've already condemned Him on the cross instead of them. And as they hear that Absolution and receive My Son's body and blood, by those means I forgive them for their sins. Not only that, but I give them the credit for My Son's perfect resisting of temptation. Therefore, for My Son's sake, when I look at those people at St. Mark, I don't remember their sin; instead, I see My Son's righteousness that He's given to them. Therefore, when I look at them, I see no sin, but perfect resistance to temptation."

Again, this is the Good News: Jesus resisted temptation so that He could give us the credit for His perfect resistance. He resisted the cries to come down from the cross and save Himself so that He might remain there to save you. And with the forgiveness of sins, He gives you the credit for His flawless obedience. The defense rests.

**Information obtained from: thehumantoloffail.vera.org*