

The Back Door

The doorbell rings. You weren't expecting company, so you glance through the window as you move to the front door. You don't recognize the person standing there with a clipboard in his hand. A neighborhood salesman. Even before you open the door, you are formulating how to politely decline whatever it is he is selling. *You are guarded.*

The doorbell rings. You weren't expecting company, so you glance through the window and don't see anyone there. You realize there is someone at the back door when you hear a light knock. As you move to answer it, you see the familiar face of your dear friend. Immediately your heart warms and your face brightens and you open the door quickly to let them in. *They are trusted.*



After the first miraculous signs Jesus performed in Jerusalem, the crowds were in awe. John 2:23 says, "Many believed in his name. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men." (NASB) Jesus was guarded against the surge of popularity that rested not on genuine repentance of heart, but on fascination with displays of power.

Nearly two years later, Jesus is with his disciples and asks them who everyone is saying He is. He then asks, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter plainly states, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Peter is a trusted friend. At that point, Jesus begins to reveal that He will "go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." When Peter tells Jesus that He would never have to suffer and die, Jesus recognizes the words—Satan had also tempted Jesus in the wilderness with receiving a kingdom that did not include suffering, if he would only bow to him. At that moment, Jesus addressed the temptation in Peter's words: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:21-23)

Satan's attempts failed in the wilderness when he came *directly* against Jesus because Jesus was guarded with the Word of God. Satan's attempts failed when he came *indirectly* through the crowd's swooning applause, because Jesus was guarded and saw the unrepentant hearts. But Satan's most clever disguise was to come through the back door—the door that friends come through—to use a trusted friend to speak the same temptation. Peter wasn't maliciously trying to subvert the Son of God. In his mind, he was giving the most logical piece of advice. Satan's attempt failed because Jesus *recognized* the words and was guarded against the lie being offered to him. His focus was on pleasing His Father, even if his closest friends were clueless to what that meant.

Most of the temptations that Christians face do not come from the world that comes ringing at the front door, because they are guarded against those. Most fall to temptations that come in from close Christian friends that may not be living by God's truth at that moment—and usually the intentions are quiet innocent. Have you ever noticed that gossip sounds so much more gossipy when you overhear strangers talking with each other? But it sounds almost like essential information when coming from a close friend! Or a flirtatious gesture from a stranger feels inappropriate, but the same gesture from a close friend can be dismissed as "nothing"? Or advice from a book by an eastern mystic we can immediately see as opposed to sound doctrine, but the same advice from a pastor sounds so wise? The goal of guarding the back door is not to heighten distrust of our close friends, but to develop *a sharp recognition* of the temptations that might be coming in the back door with them. Our enemy is very clever at disguising himself.