

NOTATIONES

MAJT 22 (2011): 107-127

THE VICTORY OF CHRIST OVER THE TEMPTER AS HELP TO THE BELIEVERS' FIGHT AGAINST SIN

—A REFLECTION ON MATTHEW 4:1-11—

by Jacques Roets

Introduction

JESUS TAUGHT us to pray, “Our Father ... lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13). This was not a petition born from an ivory tower, showing some sympathy for sin-tempted believers but not really knowing what temptation means. We may not liken Jesus’ words here with the words supposedly spoken by Marie Antoinette who, upon hearing that the peasants in France had no bread to eat, said: “Let them have cake.” No, Jesus doesn’t speak about temptation as one who is unfamiliar with its tug-and-pull. He teaches us to pray this petition because it is born out of the fires of his own struggles with the tempter. Jesus knows the power of temptation. He knows its seduction. He knows its destructive effects, more intensely than any other human being ever will. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus faced the assault and the attack of the tempter (Matt. 3:13-4:12).

That Jesus, the sinless Son of God, faced temptation is immensely comforting and instructive to us in our own struggles with temptation. In what follows I want us to meditate together on Jesus’ battle with the evil one. In seeing his battle against Satan, we can be inspired and helped in our fight against sin and temptation.

Before we begin our reflection we must understand that Jesus’ struggle, in one sense, was unique and unlike our own. He was facing the tempter as the “last Adam,” “the second man” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45, 47). His battle with the devil was part of the accomplishment of our salvation, part of his undoing of Adam’s failure. So we must distinguish between what Jesus did *for us* in facing these temptations and what we can learn *from him* generally to help us in our fight against sin. In noting that, however, it is necessary to be absolutely clear that what Jesus did for us is much more important and of greater consequence to understand and rejoice in than the lessons we can glean from him in our own battle with temptation. Any victory over sin in our lives is really his. In fact, the ultimate victory is his and any small successes we have is only because of his great victory. This is essential to keep in mind so that

we don't become weighed down with our repeated failures and lose hope; or conversely, so that we don't become proud in our triumphs, forgetting that the only reason we actually enjoy some victories is because we share in the victory of Christ.

Keeping this distinction in mind, I want to focus first on five principles which apply specifically to Jesus as our Mediator in his struggle against temptation. I shall call them, for lack of a better formulation, *Messianic Principles*. From there, I want to draw out some general principles discernable from these events which can help us in our struggle with sin.

The Uniqueness of Christ's Temptation

The uniqueness of Jesus' temptations is of central importance for us to grasp because it is our hope, and comfort, and ultimately our victory over sin depends completely upon it. Any freedom we enjoy from sin and temptation (yes, very limited in this life but complete in the next), comes to us from this victory of the Messiah. So every Christian must joyfully reflect on how Jesus fights and attains victory here at the beginning of his earthly ministry.

Messianic Principle #1:

Jesus' Temptations Were a Testing from the Father

This principle is key for understanding the passage under consideration. "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (v. 1). The Greek word translated here "tempted" can also be translated "tested" (cf. Mat. 16:1; 19:3, 22:18, 35). At times the two meanings both apply. What from the devil's perspective is a "temptation" is from God's perspective a "test." There is great mystery here, and the issues are much deeper than we can explore at this time,¹ but we have to say that God's sovereign designs are so marvelous that he often uses the evil motives of his enemies to bring about good for his loved children. Remember Joseph? (Gen. 50:19-20; cf. 45:5-8).

In being baptized, Jesus has willingly embraced the purpose for which he came into this world. His baptism was his reporting for duty. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance (Mat. 3:11). Acknowledging their sins, the people entered the water to have their sins symbolically washed away. As Jesus the sinless-one entered the waters in which the people's sins were washed away he shows how he, who needs no repentance or forgiveness, will take the people's sins on himself. He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) As he exits the water, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit anoints him, and the Father blesses him, for now he takes up his redemptive task (Mat. 3:16-17).

The very first act is for Jesus to be tested. As the first man, Adam, who was tested by God in order to see whether he would be faithful and obedient to the Lord with all his heart, so Jesus was tested, being driven into the wilderness, the world Adam left behind, to be tempted by the devil. It was the Spirit of God who took the initiative so that the Servant of the Lord might be

1. If the reader is interested in pursuing this issue further, see John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.xviii. Later under General Principle #1 we will return to this issue.

tested by Satan's schemes, to determine whether he, unlike Adam, would be faithful to the end.

The good news (as we know) is that he passed the test.

Messianic Principle #2:

Jesus' Temptations Target His Messianic Task

The uniqueness of Jesus' temptations lies in the fact that each temptation has direct bearing on an aspect of his messianic task. This makes these temptations unlike anything we face, and reminds us what is at stake in his victory or what will be lost in his failure. Had he failed, salvation itself would be impossible; but since he succeeded, our salvation is safe. We must anchor our hope and confidence in him and in him alone. In our struggle with temptation, we can rest secure that since he won, our struggle is not the struggle on which our salvation depends. What freedom and hope this brings. Your failure in the struggle against temptation is not the end of your salvation. No, the victory is Christ's. This provides us the hope to continue, to stand up again and fight on. But I am getting ahead of myself.

The first temptation (at least in the Matthew's account), like the temptation of Adam and like many of the struggles of Israel in the wilderness, deals with physical appetites, specifically, eating. Matthew states the obvious in telling us that Jesus was hungry. But this accentuates the reality and brutal intensity of Jesus' hunger. "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry" (v. 2). It is hard for us, who possibly have never suffered hunger for more than a few hours, to imagine the intensity of Jesus' hunger after forty days. Yet it is only in light of this lengthy duration, reminiscent of Israel's forty years in the wilderness, that the gnawing force of the temptation is evident: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (v. 3). What is he enticing Jesus to do? He is saying to him: "Since God has just declared you to be his Son (Matt. 3:17), surely he would not mind if you help yourself with a little food. No good father would withhold food from his own son. Use your power to help alleviate your hunger." Very subtly the tempter was raising doubts about the goodness of God, and suggesting that Jesus free his eating from the command of God (like Adam). He is tempting Jesus to serve himself rather than wait obediently for God to supply his needs.

This has direct bearing on the whole purpose for which Jesus came into the world. Will he live for himself, or will he submit himself totally to the will of the Father, even at great cost to himself? It is a temptation that strikes at the heart of the cross. Will Jesus serve himself, follow his own agenda, or will he truly be the priest of God who lays down his life as a ransom for many?

In facing this temptation, Jesus remained the faithful priest of God. He refused to free his eating from God's command: "It is written: 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' " (Matt. 4:4).

Having failed in his first attempt to lead Jesus into sin, the evil one strikes a second time. This time he approaches Jesus as a Bible scholar, feigning a trust in Scripture. Jesus, the truly great prophet, has just revealed his high view of Scripture. So Satan now invents a temptation that aims to exploit that trust. He takes Jesus to the holy city, to the holiest place in that city, the temple, which was the one place on earth where God had declared he would dwell with his people. There God was present and his children found protection (cf. Ps. 84). It was in the temple that the reality of Psalm 91

would be supremely experienced: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust'" (Ps. 91:1, 2). This is the very Psalm Satan now uses in order to tempt the Savior. Taking him to the highest point of the temple, he says: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (Matt. 4:6; cf. Ps. 91:11, 12). "Since you are the Son of God, do this experiment to prove the truth of God's Word. God has promised you (you of all people, his Son) protection by his angels. Prove the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's promises, jump down!"

He is tempting Jesus to establish the truthfulness of God's Word by his own experience. The experiment will show whether God is to be trusted or whether Jesus really trusts God. In reality, however, proceeding in this way Jesus' trust will actually no longer be rooted in God and his Word but in himself, in his own experience. Leaping from the top of the temple would not show trust in God; rather, doing so would undo Jesus' prophetic task. Jesus however refuses to jump from the heights of the temple. He refuses to let go of his prophetic task. He remains faithful to the Lord and his Word. He will not test God, acting as if God must prove his Word to him by experimentation. No, he clings to God's Word, knowing that Scripture must interpret Scripture: "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (v. 7).

Satan, though, does not easily give up. He tempts Jesus a third time. In this temptation it is as if the gloves come off, and the fierce attack of the enemy is revealed in all its naked brutality. He takes Jesus to an exceedingly high mountain and shows him "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (v. 8). Then he simply says to Jesus: "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (v. 9).

At first we wonder what the temptation in this would be to Jesus. But this must have been by far the most powerful temptation. Satan is offering Jesus here the rewards of the cross *without the cross*. He is bidding Christ to take a short-cut and bypass Golgotha. But the cross is the actual purpose for which Christ came into the world. He surrendered the glory he had with the Father before the world began, venturing into this fallen creation in order to reclaim what was ruined—the kingdoms of this world—and to usher a redeemed kingdom back to God. The way for Jesus to ascend the throne was to go through the terrible suffering and desolation of the cross. The way of restoring the rebellious kingdom of this world was to suffer the unimaginable death of forsakenness and God-abandonment. Here the evil one is offering Jesus a way to sidestep all the agony and hell of the cross. It is the ultimate *the-end-justifying-the-means* temptation.

To be sure, in every one of Christ's temptations our salvation was in the balance. Here, however, we see just how high the stakes are. The amazing thing is this: Jesus does not abandon his calling; he does not take the short-cut offered. He is truly God's king: "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (v. 10).

Jesus remained faithful to his mandate to be God's Messiah. Every temptation employed by the devil is an attempt to get Jesus to abandon his calling, first as priest, then as prophet, last as king. But he resists every assault and remains faithful to the Father. He passes the test, for he truly is the Son of God. *Hallelujah! What a Savior!* His faithfulness becomes our faithfulness,

his victory becomes our victory! In him we have the victory that overcomes the world (see 1 John 5:4).

Messianic Principle #3:
Jesus' Temptations Function to Undo the Failure of Adam and
Fulfill What Israel Was Called to Do

We can only understand Jesus' temptations when we read them in the context of the history of redemption. As we have already mentioned, Jesus came as the second Adam to undo the failure of the first Adam. The first man, Adam, was tempted to forsake his God-given duty, to free himself from obedience to God, and to live by his own choices (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-7). He failed to resist and left this world a wasteland. The second Adam entered this world as the first Adam had left it—in ruin. So we find him not in paradise, not in a garden, but in the wilderness. And here he is tempted as the first Adam was, but this Adam does not fail. Unlike the first Adam, he refuses to surrender his obedience to God; he refuses to live for himself. He remains faithful to God with all his being.

The three quotes Jesus uses to resist Satan's temptations lead us to observe another important point concerning these temptations—namely all three quotations come from Moses' sermon on the plains of Moab, where he addresses the Israelites before their entrance into the Promised Land.

These three quotations come from Deuteronomy 6–8, a section in which Moses reminds the people of God's faithfulness to them during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. God deliberately puts them through this time of hardship to test and teach them. God was teaching them to live in trusting obedience to him: "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you" (Deut. 8:5). Israel was God's son (cf. Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1-4), and because God loves his son he will teach him what he needs to know. He will teach the Israelites not to depend on bread alone but on his word for life (8:3), not to put him to the test (6:16), but instead to make him the sole object of their worship and obedience (6:13).

In Matthew's Gospel, we are shown another "Son of God" in the wilderness (Matt. 3:17). He has been there forty days instead of forty years. He is likewise put to the test as God's servant—*this* in order to prepare for his divine commission. Like Israel, he too must pass through the same tests in the wilderness and learn the same lessons that they so imperfectly grasped. Israel's conquest of the Promised Land was a flawed fulfillment of the hope they had. But this new "Son of God" will not fail, and the new Exodus will succeed. To use the elegant summary of one author: "Where Israel of old stumbled and fell, Christ the new Israel stood firm."²

In the story of Jesus' temptations and the testing of his faithfulness to the Father, our Lord is presented as the one who *undoes* the work of the first Adam; and he, as the true Israel, as the "Son of God," will fulfill all of God's redemptive purposes for his people.

2. M. D. Goulder quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 128. R.T. France's comments on pages 127-28 were a great help to me in seeking to make this point.

Messianic Principle #4:
Jesus' Victory over Temptation Is Our Victory

This principle makes unambiguous something we have touched upon under principle three. It is important to cement this in our hearts and minds. Here Jesus' struggle with the enemy of human souls was not just one tussle among many. It was the definitive struggle! Jesus victory over the evil one is the victory you and I need in our fight against temptation. His victory is the one which undoes Adam's failure and fulfills the obedience to which God had called his old covenant people Israel. So in Jesus Christ we have not only everything we need in order to overcome the guilt of sin but also everything we need in order to meet all the obligations of obedience to God which is his due.

The implications of this are remarkable.

It is not our faithfulness and victory over temptation which bring us peace with God. It is not my ability to resist temptation which gives me a right standing with the Lord. It is all the work of Jesus Christ—and I must rest in him, in his perfect work, in his victory. How truly comforting and inspiring that is!

Contrary to human thinking, this does not lead to license (see Rom. 6); rather, it leads to greater zeal in the pursuit of holiness. Because you do not look to yourself for strength or to your own accomplishments to motivate you, you rely instead on Christ's power and his victory to spur you on in obedience, to become what you are already in Christ. Oh, we need to anchor our hearts in Christ's victory as our own, for we are prone to think that we must or can do it ourselves.

So often I find myself falling into the habit of thinking: "Yes, I am saved by Christ. But now the work is mine!" I am Reformed enough in my theological commitments never to say that out loud, but my heart often betrays my correct theological judgments. This betrayal of my heart comes to clarity particularly when I fail, for when I fail (as I far too often do) I beat myself up: "You are a pastor? Are you even a Christian? How could do such a thing?"

This sort of response is born out of self-reliance. I know I need to anchor my heart in Christ's victory. When I do, I stop beating myself up and I truly repent. I am filled with a godly sorrow because I have sinned against God, but that is coupled with a holy joy, knowing that Jesus' blood and his obedience is bigger than my sin and able to cover it all, always.

I suspect other believers are not unlike me. We must all root our hearts in Christ. We must look to his victory over the evil one here in Matthew 4. We must look to his victory *as our victory*. We must put all our hope, all our confidence, all of our security, all of our future upon him, and let none of it rest on ourselves. Then we will have the peace and joy to face with assurance all the temptations that come our way. Not that we will beat back every temptation in this life. We will sin. Nonetheless, we shall overcome. We are more than conquerors through him who loves us (Rom. 8:37). His victory is our salvation. His victory overcomes the world. It is upon his victory that we stake our lives.

Messianic Principle #5:
 Jesus' Temptations "Qualified" Him to Be Our High Priest So That
 He May Sympathize with Us and Help Us

This principle views Jesus' struggle against the evil one from our perspective, and from this vantage point we see how his temptations equip him to be our faithful and sympathetic high priest. To speak of the temptations "qualifying" Jesus to be our high priest might not be the right word, and that's why it is placed in quotation marks. I am trying to capture what is taught so powerfully in Hebrews: "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18), and "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). These two verses offer a wonderful comfort and hope to us. Nevertheless, don't we often doubt them? Inasmuch as Jesus was sinless and did not succumb to temptation we imagine that he does not really know the full power of temptation. Consequently, we doubt whether he can *truly* sympathize with us. In fact, the exact opposite is actually the case. As Donald Macleod explains:

Precisely because he did not yield easily and was not, like us, an easy prey, the devil had to deploy all his wiles and use all his resources. The very fact that he was invincible meant that he endured the full force of temptation's ferocity, until hell slunk away, defeated and exhausted. Against us, a little temptation suffices. Against him, Satan found himself forced to push himself to his limits.³

B. F. Westcott further clarifies this point when he says:

Sympathy with sinners in their trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.⁴

These remarks bring home something wonderful: Jesus, exactly because he was sinless, understands the power of temptation in greater measure than we ever will. He experienced the power of temptation to the uttermost, yet did not succumb.

This is why he is such a sympathetic high priest. He knows what we are up against. He knows the power of temptation—its tug at our souls. He knows what effort is required to resist it. Jesus knows exactly what each of us faces in temptation. You and I have ample reason to draw near to him and cast ourselves upon his love and mercy in our time of greatest struggle. Because Jesus can sympathize with us in this way (Heb. 4:15), let us not hesitate to do what we are commanded to do in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

What help does Christ offers us in the midst of our temptations? Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, in his commentary on Hebrews 2:17-18, explains it well:

3. Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 227-28.

4. Westcott quoted by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 124.

The help, moreover, which Christ offers ... is offered not merely as man to man, but as Redeemer to sinner. This help is indeed bound up with the fellow feeling for us and with us of him who has himself endured temptation through to victory, but it is also founded on the atonement he procured for us on the cross and the triumphant power of his resurrection... The help that he brings is twofold: in the first place, forgiveness of sins, and the annulment of past defeats, and, in the second place, the power (*his* power) to fight and overcome temptation. His own conquest of temptation means for the Christian that the dominion of sin over him has been broken (Rom. 6:14). These two realities, forgiveness and power, are present in the passage before us: he who is our merciful and faithful high priest has both made propitiation for our sins and, himself the victor, *is able to help those who are tempted*.⁵

This comment requires further reflection. Jesus helps us in our struggle by reminding us that the victory over sin is ultimately his. We are back at Messianic principle four. But Hughes helps us see that the victory of Christ in his death and resurrection provides us with the forgiveness we need and with the power we require in our battle against temptation. We need forgiveness because we do not always resist and often do fall into sin. Guilt is never a great motivator in the fight of faith. Guilt weighs us down, depresses us and leaves us soft targets. When we seek to live the Christian life by our own efforts, as we far too often do, guilt of our failure would be our constant companion. But when we take our eyes off ourselves and focus them on Jesus, “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2), we know the joy of forgiveness found in him. He sets us free from the guilt of sin. We know this because he is the sacrifice that turns God’s wrath away from us, for he took it upon himself. Hebrews 2:17 calls it, making “propitiation for the sins of the people.” This means, then, that by his blood Jesus has paid for every one of our sins; he has paid for our every failure to resist temptation. He sets us free.

But not only does Jesus help us with our guilt, he also helps us in our ongoing struggle against temptation. Those who have tasted forgiveness (which by now I am sure you have figured out is an ongoing experience, not a once in a lifetime event) also desire to exult their Savior by resisting temptation more and more. To help us in that, Jesus’ resurrection power is now available to and at work in his children. The same power that raised Jesus from the grave is now at work in the lives of God’s children, so that they may fight against temptation. Paul works this out in Rom. 6:1-14 in greater detail. He reminds us that just as we are united with Christ in his death, we are also “united with him in a resurrection like his” (v. 5). This should give us great encouragement in our ongoing battle with sin given that now, like Christ, we are “dead to sin and alive to God” (v. 11).

At this point, however, we pause. So often our problem is that we forget Christ. Isn’t that true? We forget we are in him; we forget that we are not alone. We are not left to live the Christian life by our own power. We must begin to think and act in light of the reality of Christ’s death and resurrection—after all, we share in it. That is Paul’s point in Romans 6:11-13: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments of unright-

5. *Ibid.*, 124.

eousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.” The way to go about this says the writer to the Hebrews is to draw near to the throne of grace, upon which sits our great high priest who can help us, and who provides us with the power of his resurrection in our struggle with temptation.

Are you availing yourself of the wonderful privilege to come before your great high priest? Are you seeking to fight the battle with his help and power? Are you deliberately acting out of your union with him?

The fact that Jesus was tempted just as we are assures us that he is “qualified” to be our sympathetic high priest. The fact that Jesus resisted temptation, and ultimately even faced the cross and rose from the grave, assures us that he has power to help us in our struggle. May we all find encouragement to draw near to this high priest and find support and shelter with him in all our battles with temptation.

Summary of Messianic Principles

Our reflection on the work of the Savior in his struggle against the tempter has so far focused on the uniqueness and importance of this struggle in the unfolding and accomplishment of our salvation (messianic principles one through three). The last two principles mentioned have highlighted the assistance he provides, based on his own temptations, so that we can wage a more faithful fight in our own struggles with sin. We are reminded in principle four that Jesus is truly the Savior who accomplished all we need, even overcoming temptation for us; and in principle five we are reminded that we have a high priest who is wonderfully able to sympathize with us, and therefore able to help us in our struggle against sin.

In the next section we will focus on the general principles we can draw from this battle of Christ with the evil one for helping us in our fight with sin and temptation.

General Application of Jesus’ Victory over Temptation to Us

Jesus is not only our Redeemer who fulfills all righteousness for us; he is also the one who gives us a perfect example of how to fight temptation in our own lives. It is important that these two be kept together. If we focus merely on Christ’s redemptive work for us, we rob ourselves of the supreme illustration of overcoming temptation—this to our spiritual impoverishment. But if we focus on Christ as an example to the exclusion of his redemptive work for us, we lose sight of the real source and power by which we can fight against sin. Ultimately we will meet disheartening defeat upon defeat since we are looking away from Christ and relying upon ourselves. We must be Christ-reliant rather than self-reliant. Jesus as our Redeemer and as our example must be kept together.

Now we turn to consider the general principles that can be drawn from Christ’s struggle with temptation for engaging in our own struggle against the enemy of our souls. Christ is the perfect human being, the only sinless one, true God but also truly human and truly righteous man (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 15-18). He was all this in order to take our place. Consequently, even though his struggle against the evil one was unique, in the sense that he provides the definitive resistance against temptation by which we are

saved, yet because he is the perfect *human being* his struggle is also an example for us. He shows us what true victory over temptation looks like. Let us explore what we can learn from Christ.

General Principle #1:
God Is Sovereign over Temptation

This principle is a great mystery, and it is vital for us to grasp. Our hope and confidence in the face of temptation depends on our understanding of this mystery.

It is a mystery because the Scriptures are clear: God tempts no one. James 1:13 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one." God is not the author of sin. Yet Scripture also reminds us that Satan's schemes are under the sovereign control of God. In the case of Jesus, we see it clearly in the opening words of Matthew 4:1: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." We mentioned this briefly under Messianic Principle one. God tested his Son in order to see whether he would be faithful to him in all things, i.e., unlike the first Adam who failed the test. Satan's temptations, directed at Jesus, constituted Jesus being tested in his messianic office by the Father. The Spirit drove him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. God brought him to the place of testing.

It is perhaps impossible for us to reconcile in our minds both ideas: (1) God tempts no one; and (2) God is sovereign over all temptation. We must remember, however, that our understanding is not the measure of truth. God's revealed word is the standard; and God reveals that he is completely sovereign, such that even the evil intentions of the evil one are under his control (cf. Job 1 and 2).

I am aware that much more can (and probably should) be said about this mystery, but it must wait for another time. There are, however, two promises that depend on God's sovereignty over temptation that are tremendously important for our spiritual battle.

The first is found in Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good." This great promise reminds us that God works even the difficulties and temptations we face in life to have a positive and great benefit in our lives. Remember, Joseph's brothers meant to harm Joseph but God turned their evil plans into something good, not only for Joseph but also for his brothers. In this way we have great hope as Christians that God can take our struggles, even our sins, and use them to bring forth good for us. What an amazing God we have!

The second promise is 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your abilities, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." One of the first things we imagine in facing temptation is that our temptation is wholly unique. We reckon that we alone face this type of temptation. God reminds us here that all temptation we face is common. We face the same temptation others have faced. The comfort we receive in remembering the commonality of temptation is in knowing that we are not alone in our struggle.

Moreover, we have a wonderful promise: God is faithful and can be trusted to help us. How? God promises that he will never let us face a temptation which is bigger and more powerful than we can withstand. This promise puts

the lie to our lame excuses that we cannot resist temptation. God not only promises to rule over our temptations in this way, he also promises us that he will give us a way out of the temptation. God himself will provide this way out. If God was not sovereign over temptation, there would be no way he could promise us these things. But he is sovereign. We need only to believe God's promise, and in so doing we would spare ourselves so much sorrow and heartache.

General Principle #2:

Temptations Always Offer Us God-Substitutes in God-Denying Ways

It is here that the power and truly demonic nature of temptation is revealed. Temptation offers us what God alone can give—and in ways which replace or deny God. By offering us what God alone can give and in ways that he forbids, succumbing to temptation guarantees our destruction, for sin brings on us divine judgment. Temptation has truly diabolical intentions.

It is especially in the answers of Jesus to the temptations of the evil one that he reveals what lies behind each temptation. Behind every temptation is a promise that seeks to replace God. In the first temptation Jesus is urged to free his eating from God's provision and provide for himself. "God surely wouldn't care if you help yourself a little, since you are his Son!" But Jesus refuses to subvert God, to place his own demands for food above his Father's will for him. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but from every word that comes from God" (Matt. 4:4). In the second temptation Jesus is tempted to put God to the test. In this way God becomes our servant and his word is to be trusted only because God proves himself to us. But Jesus remains resolute: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matt. 4:7). The final temptation promises Jesus the world without the cross, but he must worship the devil himself to get it. Not for a moment does Jesus yield his commitment to worship the Father exclusively. "For it is written: 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (Matt. 4:10). From these temptations we see Satan offering to Jesus (in ways not ordained by God) what God alone can give. This is the manner in which temptation invites us to put God aside for a moment, to regard him as secondary, and to seek to obtain what is of primary importance to us apart from God. However, in substituting God for fame or pleasure or love, we also substitute joy and blessedness. The devil never delivers on his promises. Instead of what we seek, we receive the condemnation of God.

General Principle #3:

Satan Is a Creature and Tempts Us with What Is at Hand

Satan is powerful, to be sure, very powerful. Nonetheless, he is still merely a creature. Therefore, he is limited in what he can do, limited by creaturely boundaries. He can only work with what is at hand. He cannot create anything. He might be able to stir our imaginations and stimulate our desires but he is still bound by creaturely limits. We do well to remember this, even if it is hard to understand.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis depicts a conversation between a veteran demon and an apprentice. The more experienced demon-warrior instructs the apprentice in the fine art of tempting Christians. That art-form is

displayed for us in a discussion on using pleasure to entice. Says the veteran to the apprentice:

Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's [God's] ground. I know we [the demons] have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His [God's] invention, not ours. He [God] made the pleasures: all our [the devils'] research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take pleasures which our Enemy [God] has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain and it's better *style*. To get the man's soul and give him *nothing* in return—that is what really gladdens our Father's (Satan's) heart.⁶

The evil one cannot create pleasure, only God can. All that Satan can do is use pleasure in ways God forbids. He is bound by what God has given. This is the connection with the point made under General Principle one. Satan works with what God places in our lives.

In tempting Jesus, the devil uses the words that God the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism, that voice from heaven ("This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"—Matt. 3:17), and he uses Jesus' hunger as the avenue by which to tempt him. In the second and third temptations, the devil uses what he knows from the Old Testament about God's promise concerning the Messiah and seeks to undo Jesus with those promises. In each scenario, however, Satan is bound by creaturely limitations.

What is the benefit of grasping this? It helps us to understand our own temptations. Often, right before our eyes, the things we are naturally inclined toward—these are the things that Satan uses to tempt us. And here we again discover the real diabolical nature of the evil one. He takes what is dearest to us and uses it against us. Our strongest passions become our biggest weaknesses. With Jesus, Satan uses the reality that he is the beloved Son, the Son of God, in an effort to turn Jesus against his Father. With us, Satan pursues the same strategy. Several years ago I read an article with the title "Marriage Guru Divorces." It was about a counselor who was credited for saving over 11,000 marriages, and yet the one that really mattered, his own, he destroyed. Satan has a way of doing this sort of thing. That is why Scripture bids us to be careful, and warns us about being over-confident: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Watch out! Be alert! Consider what is dearest to you, since Satan will likely seek to tempt and undo you there.

Knowing this devilish stratagem is tremendously helpful, for we can better battle temptation when we are familiar with the devious devices of our enemy. In this way we are not totally outwitted by Satan (see 2 Cor. 2:11).

6. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 49-50.

General Principle #4:
Most of the Time Temptation Is Tailor-made for Us

This principle might sound like it contradicts the commonality of temptation mentioned under the first general principle. Yet it is very important that we grasp this fourth principle if we are to understand better the cunning contours of Satan's methods and maneuvers against us. To be sure, Satan often tempts us with the common desires of money, sexual pleasure, popularity, recognition, and the like. But he always customizes those temptations to entice a particular individual. He takes our measurements and tailors temptation for us, looking for chinks in our armor.

With Jesus, the devil focused on Christ's offices, his calling, his commission. In the first temptation he stressed Jesus identity as the Son of God, aiming to get Jesus to misuse his rights as God's Son and thereby undermine his submission to the Father. In the second temptation he twists God's word, seeking to deceive Jesus into putting God to the test and misapply Scripture; and in that way Jesus would fall short of obedience to God by reversing the order between God and servant—God would be made the servant. In the third temptation Satan offers a way for Jesus to accomplish his mission as the Christ—the very purpose for which he was sent into the world—but the path proffered is contrary to the one ordained by God. In brief, each temptation is customized for Christ exactly and uniquely. Each was tailor-made for Jesus and for him alone.

Likewise, Satan will seek to devise temptations that fit each individual exactly. Thus he tempts men and women differently. For example, although sexual temptation comes to both sexes, men are often tempted by visual allurements and the thought of physical pleasure, while women generally are tempted by the desire for sexual closeness as promising a relationship of deeper intimacy.

More specifically, each of us individually is also tempted to commit the same sin by different means and circumstances. For example, What exactly is it about another person that attracts you to him or her? If you think about it carefully, you will likely discover something peculiar or unique to you and your needs or particular desires.

The point of this and the prior principle is that Satan's temptations—even though they are well designed and seem irresistible, exposing our weakness—are in reality resistible, and we need not surrender to them. Thus the situation is not really as depressing as it might appear. When we know the devil's ploys and tricks, we can likewise fashion a tailor-made plan of action to counter the temptations crafted for us. In other words, when we acknowledge our own proclivities, along with the ways Satan assaults us by means of them, we can prepare ourselves to stand guard against him and fight off his attacks.

General Principle #5:
Temptation Itself Is Not Sin

The following three principles are closely related. They deal with drawing the wrong conclusions from the presence of temptation in our lives, crippling us in our struggle against it.

Jesus' temptations help us to establish the important principle that temptation itself is not sin. Jesus was and remained sinless. Paul is very emphatic: He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). And the writer to the Hebrews brings Christ's temptations and his sinlessness together when he says: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The fact that Jesus faced temptation while the Scriptures emphatically maintain his sinlessness brings home to us that temptation itself is not sin.

This is important because at times we can feel guilty about temptation itself, even though we have not yielded to it. The mere presence of temptation burdens us with feelings of guilt. Maybe an illustration would help us here. Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, recalled how in his youth he was tempted by thoughts of blasphemy, and how he had approached an older saint for help. The story in his words:

Ah! I recollect a dark hour with myself when I, who do not remember to have even heard a blasphemy in my youth, much less to have uttered one, found rushing through my mind an almost infinite number of curses and blasphemies against the Most High God. I specially recall a certain narrow and crooked lane, in a country town, along which I was walking one day, while I was seeking the Saviour. On a sudden, it seemed as if the floodgates of hell had been opened; my head became a very pandemonium; ten thousand evil spirits seemed to be holding carnival within my brain, and I held my mouth lest I should give utterance to the words of blasphemy that were poured into my ears. Things I had never heard or thought of before came rushing impetuously into my mind, and I could scarcely withstand their influence. It was the devil throwing me down and tearing me. These things sorely beset me; for half-an-hour together, the most fearful imprecations would dash through my brain. Oh, how I groaned and cried before God! That temptation passed away, but ere many days, it was renewed again, and when I was in prayer, or when I was reading the Bible, these blasphemous thoughts would pour in upon me, more than at any other time. I consulted with an aged godly man about it. He said to me, "Oh, all this many people of God have proved before you! But," he asked, "do you hate these thoughts?" "I do," I truly answered. "Then," he said, "they are not yours; ... send them on to the devil, the father of them, to whom they belong, for they are not yours."⁷

As this old saint reminded Spurgeon, "they are not yours, ... send them on to the devil ... to whom they belong." We don't have to load our conscience with guilt when we have resisted temptation. We have enough sins concerning which to repent. Those thoughts that drop into our heads from nowhere and disturb us must be dealt with as imposters and not as our own. Indeed, at times we beat ourselves up for mere thoughts of temptation which sap our energy and discourage us. Remember that Christ was sinless even though he suffered temptations. The mere presence of temptation is not sin.

7. C.H. Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon Autobiography: Volume 1: The Early Years 1834-1859* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1994), 65-66.

General Principle #6:

The Presence of Temptation Is Not a Sign of Spiritual Decline

When we take our eyes off Christ, we often fall into all kinds of false thinking that weaken our defenses and make us easy prey for our spiritual enemies. One such thought is that being tempted in one way or another means that we have backslidden and are in spiritual decline. However, inasmuch as Christ was tempted (and we do not judge him to be backslidden or in spiritual decline), we can take comfort in knowing that the presence of temptation is not, as such, a sign of spiritual declension. In fact we must affirm the opposite. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne expressed it: "I know well that when Christ is nearest, Satan is busiest." In other words, when we are far from Christ, Satan is glad and does not need to bother himself with us. But the closer we are to our Savior the more he strives to draw us away. Our enemy works harder on us when we draw nearer to the Lord. John Wycliffe, the forerunner to the Reformation, said it this way: "Let no man think himself to be holy because he is not tempted, for the holiest and highest in life have most temptations. How much higher the hill is, so much is the wind there greater; so, how much higher the life is, so much the stronger is the temptation of the enemy."⁸

General Principle #7:

The Presence of Temptation Does Not Mean
the Absence of the Spirit

Although this principle is very similar to the previous one, it is important to make its point explicit. In the face of temptation we frequently and falsely conclude that the presence of temptation itself means the Holy Spirit has withdrawn from us. This then accounts for our undergoing temptation and why the devil is assaulting us.

However, Luke's account of Jesus' temptations makes it absolutely clear that Jesus faced temptation empowered by the Spirit: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (4:1). After these episodes of temptation, Luke again emphasizes the Spirit's presence in Jesus' life: "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (4:14). God's Spirit was with him throughout the period of testing. It is no different in our own lives. The Spirit does not abandon us. He remains at work in our lives and strengthens us to fight against temptation.

Scripture tells us that when we give in to temptation, we grieve the Spirit. It also tells us that we must repent and cast ourselves once more on the perfect work of Christ as the sole atonement for our sins. But we must not deduce from the presence of temptation the absence of the Spirit. That is exactly what the evil one desires, so that we become reliant upon our own strength, thinking that we must free ourselves from temptation if the Holy Spirit is to dwell with us. Such distorted thinking brings about a reversal of God's gracious arrangement of our life in Christ and twists the gospel into an unrecognizable image, as though we merit the Spirit's presence through our

8. Both of these quotations come from *The Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*, compiled by Mark Water (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 1035, 1037.

sinlessness. If we conceive of the Christian life using these categories, we should call it what it is: another attempt to save ourselves that demoralizes our true spiritual vitality. We need to be on your guard against any thought that draws us away from Christ and his Spirit and makes us depend on our own labors.

General Principle #8:
Never Forget Who Your Enemy Is

The nature of the enemy of our souls is revealed in the names ascribed to him in Matthew 4. In verse 3 he is called the “tempter.” In verses 1, 5, and 8 he is referred to as the “devil,” and in verse 10 Jesus calls him “Satan.”

First, he is called the “tempter.” He is the one who entices, who seek to lead us astray. His very purpose in life is to seek to catch us and lead us away from God. He portrays and shades things in such a way that they look so appealing, so reasonable, so delightful; he hides from us, however, the real consequences of our sinning. As we saw, he tempted Christ three times in his trifold office: first, in his priestly office; then, in his prophetic office; and finally in his royal office. In each case, Satan makes great promises but he hides the consequences of doing what he intimates. He also hides the fact that he, the devil, cannot and will not deliver on his assertions and promises. Satan is a liar and has no intention of bringing blessing or flourishing with his so-called promises. His intent is always malicious. He seeks to derail Christ from his mission and so destroy God’s plan of salvation. The same wicked intentions apply to us. Satan makes great promises but hides the penalties of giving in to temptation. His aim is always to harm us spiritually.

In fact, the moment we fall for his schemes, he turns on us. That is why he is called the “devil” which means “accuser.” He is the accuser and seeks to hold our consciences in bondage. In short, he is double-tongued, for first he tempts and entices, telling us to take a bite, look how delicious and appetizing it is, no one will know; whereupon, in our surrendering to his alluring words, he turns on us and accuses us, asking us how we could have done such a thing and what would our Father say. The devil is a short-lived friend. He promises you wonderful things, but he brings you shame and guilt, calling down on you denunciations.

It is no wonder that Jesus calls him that name which highlights his true nature, for Jesus calls him “Satan,” meaning, “Adversary.” Jesus shows us that no matter how friendly Satan may appear he is still a fiend, not our friend. He will stop at nothing to derail the plans of God and to destroy our souls. He will even present himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) and quote Scripture. But he is always our enemy; he is always out to destroy us. Indeed, that is his goal: *destruction*. Satan is unwavering and resolute in the pursuit of this goal, even attacking the Son of God, God’s beloved Son, the Christ. Never forget that temptation come from the evil one, the enemy of our souls.

General Principle #9:
Never Reason with Temptation

One of our biggest mistakes we make is to overestimate our own ability to reason ourselves out of temptation. We think that if we argue and reason

with temptation, we will be able to resist it. Logic does not help in the face of temptation. Every time you seek to reason with temptation it will win the argument. Temptation's logic is always irrefutable! As we will explore below, Jesus does not reason with temptation.

Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* gives us a good illustration of the danger of reasoning with temptation. In Book VI he tells the story of one of his friends, Alypius, who before his conversion had a great love for the bloody gladiatorial games. After his conversion, he turned his back on the games. However, sometime later he ran into some old friends in Rome who dragged him along to the amphitheater. He sought to resist them with these words: "If you drag my body to that place and sit me there, do not imagine you can turn my mind and my eyes to those spectacles. I shall be as one not there, and so I shall overcome both you and the games." When they arrived at the theater he kept his eyes shut, refusing to think of the evil going on around him. If only "he had blocked his ears as well!" Augustine explains what happened next:

A man fell in combat. A great roar from the entire crowd struck him with such vehemence that he was overcome by curiosity. Supposing himself strong enough to despise whatever he saw and to conquer it, he opened his eyes. He was struck in the soul by a wound graver than the gladiator in his body, whose fall caused the roar.... As soon as he saw the blood, he at once drank in the savagery and did not turn away.... What should I add? He looked, he yelled, he was on fire, he took the madness home with him so that it urged him to return not only with those by whom he originally been drawn there, but even more than them, taking others with him.

We see here something of the folly of arguing with temptation. Augustine, in his reflective prayer following this passage, reveals the true problem with his friend—and *that* would be trying to argue with temptation: "Nevertheless [Augustine addressing God in his prayer] from this you delivered him by your strong and merciful hand, and you taught him to put his confidence not in himself but in you (Isa. 57:13)."⁹ When we reason with temptation, we are self-dependent rather than depending upon God.

This leads us to the next principle, where we see how Jesus emphatically and quickly deals with temptations. He never argues with them.

General Principle #10: Wield "the Sword of the Spirit"

Jesus shows us how we must forcefully and unequivocally deal with temptation, and that is by cutting it off at the knees, so to speak. With every temptation Satan placed before him, Jesus immediately responds with an ardent appeal to Scripture: "It is written..." (Matt. 4:4); "It is written..." (Matt. 4:7); "Be gone, Satan! For it is written..." (Matt. 4:10). No debate, no argumentation, just unhesitating resistance and rebuke of the devil's ploys. Jesus does not even use his own words in responding to temptation. Rather, he uses the written word of God. This is remarkable because being himself God he had the authority to reproach the evil one directly. But we need to re-

9. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, The World's Classics, trans. with introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 100-101.

member that Jesus is tempted in his capacity and office of Messiah and as such he stands in our place. Therefore he stands as the ultimate man, the second Adam, and as God's man, the Christ, he resists temptation by appealing to God's word. This is truly wonderful. As he defeats temptation for us, he also shows us how we can fight the battle—which is: don't reason with sin; instead, take up the sword of the Spirit and cast it off. For when we take up the sword of the Spirit, God's word, we actually have God's wisdom and power at hand, which helps us stand firm against temptations. While we can block the fiery darts of the evil one with the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit is our only offensive weapon by which we can fight off Satan (see Eph. 6:10ff.).

When we bring this principle to bear on what we said earlier about temptation being tailor-made for us and Satan tempting us with what is at hand (General Principles two and three), we recognize that certain Scripture passages are ready at hand, well-suited to fend off the temptations we are likely to face. For instance, if you are tempted to fret about money, the following text counters that temptation: "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:5). Meditating on these words can be a great help as you face fear and anxiety surrounding money-matters. Or when you are tempted to lust after a woman, ogling her, you can use Job's words, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (31:1, NIV). The list is innumerable.

But ask yourself: What temptation recurs frequently in your life? And what Scripture passages address those temptations? Are you ready to resist temptation, being armed with God's word?

This isn't to suggest that Scripture is a magic talisman; we mustn't think that we can conjure deliverance from evil by mindlessly reciting sacred words, thinking the evil one is fooled by such tactics. Instead, the image of Scripture being a sword—the sword of the Spirit—well depicts for us that we are engaged in a constant battle; this sword must be wielded with care, for we will need to use it again and again in resisting sin. Luke brings home this reality when he says: "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). Satan would be coming back! It is the same way with us: he returns to tempt us again and again. This brings us to the next principle.

General Principle #11:

Be Ready, Mentally Prepared, to Resist, Over and Over Again

Three times Jesus had to resist the attacks of the evil one. The little word "again" in verse 8 shows the relentlessness of temptation. Don't grow weary in your struggle against sin. One of the biggest mistakes we make is giving up after resisting once or twice. Sometimes we feel like resisting is futile since the attack seems relentless. It appears easier to give in and to repent afterwards. But Jesus shows us that we should not give up, but be prepared to resist, over and over and over again. Be committed to stay in the fight for the long-haul.

Verse 11 reminds us that Jesus experienced some rest after the period of testing, for we are told that the devil left him (for a little while at least, see Luke 4:13). In the same way, we can be assured in our struggle with tempta-

tions that we will also, in the end, receive a way out of the circumstance. As Paul promises us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, worth repeating here: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

This is a precious promise. The temptation you face will not be beyond your strength or ability to resist, and God will supply a way out. These two truths give us great motivation to persevere in resisting. We are assured that our temptations will not last forever.

General Principle #12:

Resisting Temptation Involves a Deep Commitment to and Love for God

Why did Jesus remain faithful through the trial of Satan’s attacks? The specific quotations Jesus uses to fend off the evil one reveal his deep commitment to God, stemming from his deep love for him. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus reveals that he will not eat anything without the blessing of the Father. After all, what is a good meal enjoyed without God’s blessing? In responding to the second temptation, Jesus shows us that submission to God’s word is not based on putting God to the test, so that we conduct experiments on God’s faithfulness (Matt. 4:7). This would turn the tables and reduce God to the role of proving himself to us: only having passed the test would we then put our faith in him. On the contrary, we must take God at his word and not seek to establish God’s promise by our experiments.

However, it is especially in the third temptation that we see the depth of Jesus’ love for God and his commitment to him. Jesus refuses to take the short-cut to glory by bowing before Satan. He will worship and serve God only (Matt. 4:10). Jesus knew that God’s ways are not always easy to follow (forty days of fasting, temptation in the wilderness, etc.), but because he knows God to be good, wise, and infinitely loving, he will not question God. He remains faithful to God.

Oftentimes we fall into temptation because we begin to doubt God’s love, goodness, and wisdom for us. The reason for this is because we seek to read God’s character and love for us from our circumstances and not from God’s Word. Jesus shows us that our commitment to God must always be rooted in his revelation to us and not in our experience and particular circumstances (remember: Jesus’ sad circumstances were the occasion of one of the temptations Satan cast at Jesus). Our experience must be interpreted by the word, and therefore it is a mistake to interpret the word by our experience. When we have a deep commitment to God, firmly holding on to him as good, wise, and infinitely loving, we will be better able to withstand temptation, and so bring glory to our Father.

Remember, though, in the end, it is not our ability to stand strong in temptation that saves us; it is not our victory over remaining sin that redeems us and brings us to glory. It is Jesus’ victory, his commitment to God, and his perfect, obedient love for God that saves us. Therefore, when we falter, when we stumble and fall, we look to him and find refuge in him, remembering that it is his faithfulness, his commitment to the Father—even to the bitter end of the cross—that saves us, not our faithfulness.

As you take comfort in Christ, focusing on his love for God and his commitment to the Father as the one who saves you, may you be drawn to love

God more and more, and may you become more committed to God. May this likewise empower you to resist temptation more and more. In your fight against temptation, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of your faith (see Heb. 12:1-4).

Summary of General Principles

In our consideration of general principles, being applicable to us, we have observed what we can learn from Christ's struggle and victory over temptation. We have seen that God is sovereign over temptation so that he can promise us an escape (the first general principle). We also focused on the power of temptation, which promises to give us what God alone can give and in ways that God forbids—indeed, in ways that displace God (general principle two). The third and fourth general principles help us better to understand Satan's tactics and to see how he focuses on our strengths or looks for flaws in our armor. Temptation is specifically designed and fabricated most to allure us into sin. The three general principles that follow (five through seven) enable us to place temptation in the right perspective so that we do not draw the wrong conclusions about ourselves or about God from temptation being present in our lives. The last five general principles provide us with specifics in how to combat temptation. We need to know who our enemy is, to not enter into a debate with him, but to use the word of God to contend against him and refute his lies. This contest requires, as well, a deep commitment on our part, joined with love for God, which in turn encourages us to resist the devil's enticements over and over again.

The general principles we have examined are not an exhaustive description of the believer's battle against temptation. Scripture provides us with other inducements and strategies to fight the good fight of the faith. But these principles are not to be missed, for they are sufficient to help us in this battle and to encourage us to keep fighting. We can do this, placing our confidence in Jesus' victory over sin, the one in whom we also win the battle.

Conclusion

The Christian life rests in Christ's perfect work for us. We must continually remind ourselves that this is our solace as we seek to mature into Christlikeness in our fight against sin and temptation. Christ is our Savior and our example. In this meditation, we have reflected on Jesus' temptations and on our own struggles with temptation. These reflections have moved us to rejoice in Jesus' victory as our victory.

In the first half of our discussion, we focused on Christ's work for us, where we observed that, as the "second Adam" and resisting temptation, Jesus walked the way of obedience. This forms part of his work of salvation for us. He undoes the work of the first Adam. He delivers us from temptation by his Spirit, and when we fall into temptation, his obedience, both here and throughout his life, especially at the cross, is the ground for our salvation. Indeed, his righteousness is credited to us for our justification.

In the second half of our discussion we focused on what we can learn from our Savior's struggle against sin in order to help us when we too find ourselves in scraps and scuffles with the devil. The general principles set forth lend help to us in coming to grips with the nature of temptation and how to fight against it. In focusing on Christ as our example, we should con-

stantly remind ourselves that he is our example only because he is our Savior.

In light of all we have learned in examining Christ's temptations, we easily understand why our Lord included the sixth petition in the Lord's Prayer. We need divine assistance to overcome temptation. God must see his sheep through to righteous paths. We must be delivered from evil and from the evil one. We must have his victory to secure our own. So let us continue to pray with earnestness and confidence: "Our Father ... lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13).