

The Savior:

Sinless, Yet Tempted.

A GOOD deal of controversy has been raised as to our Lord's temptations.

Many maintain that our Lord was not capable of sinning, and that His temptations looked at in a true light were real temptations.

Others maintain that unless He were capable of sinning, of falling a victim to temptation, then the temptations were not real temptations at all.

We will endeavor by God's grace to present the truth of Scripture in this matter.

First of all, note the title of this pamphlet: **THE SAVIOR: Sinless, Yet Tempted.** It is not put the other way, "tempted, yet sinless." That might give the meaning that our Lord was tempted and might have sinned, but did not. No, the sub-title is "**sinless, yet tempted,**" that is, in our title a sinless nature is predicated of our Lord, and that though sinless, He was tempted and endured real temptations.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD “TEMPTATION.”

In most places in the Scriptures to tempt means simply to test, just as a rider will put his horse to a high fence to test its powers. It does not carry in its original idea the thought of outside evil producing a sinful response in an evil nature, so that the person so tempted may fall a victim to temptation.

We get the meaning of the word in its original sense in the commonly used word **tempered**. We speak of **tempered** steel, that is, metal heated and cooled, heated and cooled, and standing the test and coming out at the required strength. Athletes, for instance, run again and again in training, tested again and again, so as to fit themselves for the hour of victory. There is no thought of evil in this, but the development of physical powers so as to be supreme in the test.

But the word, **temptation** (Greek, **peirasmos**, to try, to prove) like many words in usage by sinful men, has deteriorated in meaning, and generally in ordinary use we think of it as consisting of an appeal from some outside evil source to a craving of our sinful nature, which, if responded to, is sin.

The writer James used it in this sense when he wrote, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be **tempted with evil**, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1: 13-15). Here

James definitely speaks of being tempted with or by evil, and declares that God never does that.

When God tempted Abraham in the matter of offering up his son Isaac, God was not tempting him with evil, for God had a right to ask of him what He asked. God is the Giver of life and he can demand back what He gives. Genesis 22:1 is the very first mention in the Bible of the word **tempt** (Hebrew, **nasah**, to try, to prove).

Even James uses the word in the sense of testing when he says, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4). Again, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12).

These temptations or trials or testings are from God to bring out character and powers suitable to Himself. We could not call ourselves happy when we fall into “divers temptation” if temptation meant an evil appeal from outside to our sinful nature, which if answered to would, on the one hand, be gratifying the flesh, but on the other hand would be the conception of lust — sin — ending in death.

“COUNT IT ALL JOY WHEN YE FALL INTO DIVERS TEMPTATIONS.”

When we think of how God tested His servants to fit them for wonderful work for Him, we may well rejoice if such trials for such a purpose overtake us.

There comes to mind Abraham who was tested; Joseph and his thirteen years' bitter experience of prison, fitting him as a young man of thirty, to take a position next to Pharaoh in Egypt; of Moses, forty years at the backside of the desert, learning to be meek and patient so that he should be qualified to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt; of David, hunted by Saul as a partridge on the mountains, being disciplined and fitted to rule over God's people; of Job, stripped and desolated, finding out "the end of the Lord"; of Paul, three years in Arabia, learning of God in secret in view of his wonderful public career as a servant of the Lord.

OUR LORD WAS SINLESS YET ENDURED TEMPTATION.

What we have already written will help in our understanding of the matter. But let us come to the point at issue.

Two things are clear in Scripture:

- (1) **Our Lord was sinless.**
- (2) **He endured temptation.**

The writer believes both statements without reserve. To believe that our Lord was capable of

sinning is to overthrow the truth of Scripture as to His very Being; it would be the denial of the plain statements of Scripture, the subversion of the very foundations of the Christian faith.

Nature always expresses itself and **only itself**. If our Lord had committed only one sin — were it only a single foolish thought — it would prove a sinful nature. Nature **must** express itself, or else there is no life. But a Christ with a sinful nature could be no Savior at all. We must take our stand there.

He Himself said, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath **nothing** in Me” (John 14:30). Not in the smallest degree was there with Him that which was vulnerable to Satan’s attack. The angel Gabriel said to the virgin Mary, “That Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

There was this difference between Adam and our Lord. Adam was **innocent**; that is, as created he knew the good and had no knowledge, till he fell, that such a thing as evil even existed. Our Lord was **holy**. He knew the good, He knew that evil in all its forms existed, but He practiced the good and was not touched at any point by the evil — no sinful nature **inside** to answer to evil **outside**. He was perfectly holy.

Hear the three-fold testimony of Scripture:

- (1) The Apostle Paul, “**Who *knew* no sin**” (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- (2) The Apostle Peter, “**Who *did* no sin**” (1 Peter 2:22)
- (3) The Apostle John, “**In Him *is* no sin**” (1 John 3:5).

The context of these three Scriptures emphasizes this testimony in a remarkable way.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “He hath made Him to be sin for us, **who knew no sin**; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,” thus showing the **vital connection** between our Lord’s sinlessness and His ability to be the Sinbearer. If our Lord was capable of sinning, He could not be our Savior.

1 Peter 2:21-22 says, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: **who did no sin**, neither was guile found in His mouth,” thus setting before us the perfect sinless Example.

1 John 3:5 says, “And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins: and **in Him is no sin**” or “in Him **sin** (the old nature) **is not**,” again showing the intimate and **vital** connection between our Lord’s sinlessness and His ability to make atonement.

It is like an arch. Take one stone away and the whole collapses. Take away our Lord’s holy, absolutely sinless nature, incapable of sin in its very nature, and you lose the Savior and the gospel and all else worth having.

We must always remember that the Lord Jesus was the Eternal Son who became Man, never ceasing to be what He was from all eternity. In becoming man He was “God . . . manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). How can any one calling himself or herself a Christian predicate of our Lord — God and Man, one Person, mystery inscrutable — that He was capable of sinning.

May God forbid such blasphemy, for it is nothing short of that.

“TOUCHED WITH THE FEELING OF OUR INFIRMITIES.”

Now let us come to the text bearing directly on the matter in hand. “For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points **tempted** (Greek, **peirazō**, to try, to prove) like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Another translation helps to make clear the meaning of “**yet without sin.**” It renders it, “**sin apart**” (New Translation, J.N. Darby). It does not mean that our Lord was tempted and capable of sinning, yet did not sin. **It means that sin does not come into the question at all, that His holy nature was perfectly free from all taint of sin, even as the angel Gabriel said to Mary, calling Him “holy” from His birth into this world.**

Notice how the positive truth is emphasised by being put in a negative form. That our blessed Lord as High Priest on high is not One who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, is the positive assurance that **He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.**

INFIRMITIES, NOT SINS.

Please note very carefully that He is not touched with the feeling of our **sins**, but of our **infirmities**. He mourns over man’s sin. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter

3:18). But infirmities are not sins. There is no place for sin with our Lord. Infirmities are the result of sin, that is, weakness, weariness, sorrow, isolation, and hunger and thirst, which is natural to man's sinful condition. Our Lord in His perfect Manhood was absolutely sinless and had no sinful nature to appeal to, but in Divine sympathy went through circumstances, "*sin apart*," which gave Him to feel the sorrows and limitations His people experience in their present condition. What wonderful grace!

Am I weary? He knew weariness. Am I sorrowful? He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Do I feel the treachery of a friend? Could our Lord's sorrow be more graphically described than in Psalm 41:9, "Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me"? Tempted He was, tried in all points like as we are, "*sin apart*"! How fitted to be our sympathizing High Priest; not only understanding our feelings as One who in His Godhead is omniscient; but doing so as One who was a true Man down here in lowly grace in all the ordinary circumstances of life, but "*sin apart*."

THE TEMPTATIONS WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE LIABLE TO.

Our temptations are, alas, different! Take the case of a converted drunkard. As a Christian he meets temptation. The sight of a bar or even the fumes of intoxicating liquors may start an inward craving for indulgence to excess which once

marked him in his unconverted days. The man of lust gets converted, but alas! often there is the same inward response to sights and conditions that inflame him as in unconverted days. The avaricious man gets converted, but the same desire may continue. This is real temptation.

We may well pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). The point of this petition is that knowing we have the fallen nature within and the enemy within the gate, not that we may not be tested, knowing that the test may involve a response from the traitor within, but that we may be **delivered** from the evil all around us.

Remember, our verse does not say that our High Priest is not touched with the feeling of our **sins**, but of "our **infirmities.**" Thank God, we have a Savior who was never touched even remotely with the feeling of our sins, for that would predicate a sinful nature. In that case He would not have been the Son of God.

GOD TEMPTED ABRAHAM.

When God tempted or tested Abraham in the matter of sacrificing Isaac, the child of promise, this temptation as such had no appeal in the heart of Abraham. He did not have the remotest desire to slay his son: the command was the sorest trial. But it tested his obedience to God; it tested his faith. "**By faith** Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac" (Hebrews 11:17). So James, speaking of joy when we fall into divers temptations, says, "Knowing this, that **the**

trying of your *faith* worketh *patience*”
(James 1:3).

Abraham’s temptation or testing did not appeal to a sinful nature, but was a test of his natural affection, particularly deep in the case of Isaac, for Isaac was miraculously conceived and was the child of promise. It was a test whether natural affection or obedience and faith would triumph, yet it was a **real** trial or test.

OUR LORD’S TEMPTATIONS IN THE WILDERNESS.

Were the Lord’s temptations in the wilderness real temptations or not? God does not tempt with evil. Satan always does. The very sinlessness of our Lord surely gave Him exquisite sensibilities and the deepest shrinking from receiving temptation from such an one as Satan. He must have suffered intensely in His spirit, as none of us with our sensibilities blunted by sin could ever suffer. Who shall say these were not real temptations? Thank God, there was no sinful nature in our Lord to experience responsive attraction to the evil temptations of the devil. Yet how real were His temptations.

The wonderful scene of our Lord’s baptism had just taken place. What a sight!

(1.) Our Lord coming out of the waters of baptism, where He had identified Himself in wondrous grace with the godly remnant of Israel who had come under the power of the call to repentance made by the forerunner — John, the Baptist.

(2.) The voice of the Father heard saying, “Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”.

(3.) The Holy Spirit of God descending upon Him like a dove and lighting upon Him — a wonderful picture of the Holy Trinity in perfect accord as one God in regard to our Lord’s mission on this earth.

Now, full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. How much poorer we should have been without this example of our Lord.

Satan addressed God concerning Job, “Hast not Thou made an hedge about him and about his house and about all that he hath on every side?” (Job 1:10). When our first parents were tempted of the devil there was nothing in their circumstances to try them. Far otherwise than in the cases of Job and our first parents were the circumstances of our Lord. Not in the Garden of Eden, but in the wilderness. Not in the ordinary circumstances of life, but having “fasted forty days and forty nights” (Matthew 4:2) and “with the wild beasts” (Mark 1:13). There was no Garden of Eden for Him, there was no hedge about Him, as with Job. He was exposed without a shelter or any ameliorating circumstance to the full blast of Satan’s onslaught.

The temptation was threefold. First the tempter came to Him and said, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). Our Lord was sore hungered after his fast of forty days and nights. Hunger is not sinful. To satisfy hunger with the food God gives us is not sinful. But note the subtlety of the

temptation. Satan says in effect, "You say you are the Son of God. If you are, you have the power to turn these stones into bread. Satisfy your hunger thus and prove that you are the Son of God." Did not our Lord feel, and feel deeply, the temptation, and that just because there was no sinful nature to respond to the foul suggestion of the arch-enemy? Surely He did, and His very sinlessness accentuated the sore trial far beyond our feeble understanding. His was an unutterable shrinking from it all.

How did our Lord reply? As a dependent Man in this world, He used the weapon of Scripture. "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," quoting from the Wilderness Book of Deuteronomy (Chapter 8:3). He would not take Himself out of the hands of God to supply His need. The One who supplied the needs of the hundreds of thousands of the children of Israel in the wilderness, sufficed for Him. How happy was it, when the devil was baffled and foiled and left Him, that the angels of God ministered to Him. The messengers of His Father attended to His wants, and Satan was defeated in his blasphemous attempt.

This temptation was subtle indeed, seeking to get our Lord to satisfy a purely natural desire for food when hungry, and in it prove Himself to be what He claimed to be, the Son of God. Never for a moment was our Lord seduced from the path of absolute dependence on His Father.

The next temptation is still bolder. The devil takes our Lord and sets Him on a pinnacle of the

temple. He bids Him prove that He was the Son of God by casting Himself down, misquoting Scriptures, "He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee . . . and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone" (Matthew 4:6). Oh! the subtlety of it all. Satan left out the words in his quotation, "**to keep Thee in all Thy ways,**" which you will find in Psalm 91:11, from whence the quotation was made. The devil was seeking to get the Lord to answer to *his* (Satan's) ways. The Lord was indeed kept in all *His* ways, and those ways were ways of absolute dependence upon God. Was this a real temptation to our Lord? Thank God there was no evil within to answer to the temptation without, but surely His was the deep anguish of having an evil temptation presented to His holy mind by such an one as the devil. Again our Lord foiled the enemy by quoting from the Wilderness Book, Deuteronomy, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Chapter 6:16), thus asserting from Scripture who He was, but absolutely refusing to take Himself out of the hand of God as suggested by the devil.

The third and last temptation was still bolder. Twice repulsed, like a gambler throwing the dice for higher and higher stakes, Satan comes out in his true colors. The inmost craving of his heart was that he might be worshiped. He dangled the bait, "ye shall be as gods," before the eyes of our first parents as their reward if they would but break God's commandment, with resulting terrible consequences to themselves and the human race.

It was just this that brought about his (Satan's) own fall. "Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (Ezekiel 28:2), is Ezekiel's description of the fall of Satan. He is "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). In Revelation Satan is seen as the power behind the (future) Roman Empire. He is introduced to us as "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads" (Revelation 12:3), giving power unto the beast "having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns" (Revelation 13:1), thus showing Satan's power to confer power and empire upon one of outstanding ability and personality, and of a nature to be a willing tool in his demoniacal plans in opposition to God.

Here the devil makes one last plunge. He takes our Lord "into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:8-9). What intolerable shrinking of heart must our Lord have experienced when this temptation was thrust upon Him! What anguish of spirit must have been His, as, for the moment, He allowed Himself to be carried by Satan to the top of this exceeding high mountain! What a horrible companion, if such he could be called, for the Son of God! What sorrow of heart must have been His as He beheld the outward glory of the kingdoms of this world, full well knowing they were sunken deep in their sin of

refusing God and His truth and ways, and were for the moment in the gifts of the arch-enemy. Blessed be God, the day is not far distant when it will be said, "The kingdoms of this world are become kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and **He shall reign** for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

Our Lord turned round and said, "Get thee hence, Satan." On this occasion he had dared to seek to usurp the place of God Himself. This is intolerable; he is bidden to depart. There can be no tolerance of such an attitude. Again our Lord, for the third time quotes the Wilderness Book, Deuteronomy, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve" (Chapter 6:13). Defeated, baffled, cowed, Satan, flushed with an unbroken series of victories ever since he gained his first victory over our first parents in the Garden of Eden, met for the first time One he could not touch, One who was completely dependent upon God, truly the Son of God, triumphant, unassailable!

The devil left our Lord and angels came and ministered to Him. What a contrast is the Second (or, Last) Adam to the first! The first Adam in a garden of delights, surrounded by every creature-mercy, fell; our Lord, in a wilderness with wild beasts, sore hungered after forty days and nights of fasting, emerged unscathed and triumphant from the conflict.

A short three and a half years pass by and again Satan flings himself into the conflict, but our Lord said, "The prince of this world cometh and hath *nothing* in Me" (John 14:30). Who shall say the

Lord's temptations were not real, but not real in the sense in which they are with us, for in our case, sinful nature within answers to temptation without. In our Lord's case there was no sinful nature. He could not sin, but the very perfection of His sinlessness made His temptations very, very real, far beyond anything we could ever experience! "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8-9). Thus inextricably are bound up His experiences in the days of His flesh and His atoning work of the cross.

Thus we finish as we began: **THE SAVIOR: Sinless, yet Tempted.**

A.J. Pollock
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