



Temptation-Part 1

Our Enticements & Christ's Sinlessness

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I have to admit I don't care for camping. Just don't like it. I know you say there's some rustic allure to it all. I've heard you say that. But I prefer to have an ice machine down the hall, and a phone next to the bed that attaches to a restaurant. That's— that's my idea of an overnighiter. And I know you'll say, "Man, you really haven't been camping. I'll show you, it's fun." Listen, I've been camping, all right. I've been camping. I slept in tents and sleeping bags, and I even this week began to think about how many times I've actually slept out on dirt under the stars all night long. I've done it. I didn't like it— wasn't that great.

There's a kind of an uncomfortable vulnerability to being out there at night. I've done it in the mountains. I've done it in the High Sierras for a week— you know, a week at a time. I've done it in the deserts in California. I slept under the stars in Arizona and Utah. I've— I've done my share of sleeping outdoors. And I recognize that vulnerability is fed by reality. Remember, the first time I was up in the mountains and we were going to sleep out under the stars and the guys I was with said, "First, we gotta take all of our food and we gotta bundle it up and we gotta hoist it up in this high branch here." Like, "Well, why?" "Well, because the bears will come out at night and they want to eat." I'm thinking, so the bears are going to step over me to get to trail mix— is that what you're saying? Didn't make me feel good about sleeping outdoors.

In the desert, you know that the vulnerabilities aren't from, you know, such big creatures, but they're equally scary. You've got— I mean, you see spiders out there you think are way too big to be called spiders, and you got scorpions and slithering snakes, of course. It's just— it's not a friendly environment. So if you say to me, "We're going to spend a week sleeping out under the stars in Death Valley," or "We're going to do, you know, a week at the Marriott in Santa Barbara," to me, it's not a hard choice at all. I know what I want to do.

Now, if you can understand something of that disparity, then maybe you begin to catch a small glimpse of the jarring contrast that is embedded in the doctrine of the Incarnation. There's something huge in that. The Incarnation is that God, the second person of the Triune Godhead, willingly, as Philippians 2 says, laid it all aside— the glory of heaven. Glory is a Bible word, but the comfort, the prosperity, the luxury, the protection, the tranquility— all the good of heaven— laid it all aside. We can build a doctrine on that one Greek word in the Greek New Testament: *kenosis*— emptied himself of all the prerogatives and privileges of heaven. And he came to be found in the appearance as a man, and lived here on earth among us.

Now that is big. It's hard for us to see the contrast because we've never been there, and we've always been here. But that's a huge step down. I mean, that is an amazing thing to think about: God



putting on human form and living here on this earth. That wasn't one thing were it, you know, prior to Genesis 3— but it wasn't; it was after sin had invaded the planet. And if you think about how sin just multiplied— we couldn't get through the fourth chapter of Genesis without jealousy and rivalry and murder— and it just was downhill from there. If you think about the sin-infested world that we live in, to see the Holy One, the perfect One, come and be here, found in the weakness— the bondservant— that's the picture of Philippians 2 of, like, a servant, the fragile human being living here, subject to all of that— I mean, that's an amazing thought.

And the idea is that that was done, according to the Bible, to secure for us, as the Bible says in the very first verse you ever learned, John 3:16: because God loved us, he sent his Son into the world, because he wanted to fix the problem that we caused by sin. Jesus was going to not only come to die; he was going to come to live to rectify the problem that started with Adam. And as we ended the third chapter of Luke— that's where we stopped— Jesus was connected to Adam as the son of Adam. And as we said in the last sermon in Luke, he was the second Adam, or as Paul called him, the last Adam, who came to reverse the problem of Adam's sin.

In Luke chapter 4, as we begin to study that chapter, we see he goes into the wilderness— the wilderness, if you will. And he goes to the very place where sin began, face to face with the tempter— the snake, if you will— and he's ready to go toe-to-toe with the devil himself to reverse something we desperately needed reversed. This text— I know you've all read it. It's such a common story in the New Testament; it's repeated three times over in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But I want you to turn there to Luke 4, and let's read it afresh, and think through the reality of the God of the universe taking on human form, now being subject to the attack that took place in the garden with a kind of power behind that demonic being. Think about it— this fallen rebel of the universe that wasn't even existing prior to that, because the world now under his own thumb, so to speak, giving Jesus all the opposition that, frankly, we're used to— perhaps not with the intensity that we read of here.

And what we'll see in this text, as we examine it for the next four weeks, is that really what was going on here was Christ was winning our redemption. I mean, we'll not only understand some great tips on how we should fight our daily battles with temptation, but what we're going to understand even this morning is that what Christ was doing here was making the difference between you being cast into outer darkness and paying for every sinful thing you ever did, or being declared justified, forgiven— declared right before God. This is the showdown. And it's more important than most of us have ever imagined.

“Verse 1: And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit,” the text says, “returned from the Jordan”— remember, that was the last scene of the baptism— “and he was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days, and when they were ended, he was hungry”— understatement of the passage. “The devil said to him, ‘If you're the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ Jesus answered,” in verse 4, “It is written”— he's quoting



now Deuteronomy 8— “‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you then will worship me, it will all be yours.’ And Jesus answered him”— here a second time, Deuteronomy 6 this time— “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’ Then he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you’re the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written’”— if you’re going to quote Scripture, Satan says, I can do the same— quoting now Psalm 91— “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and, ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ And Jesus answered him and said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’”— Deuteronomy 6:16. “And when the devil had ended every temptation”— check that out; this is not just referring to the three— Jesus went into the wilderness alone, he came out, he told his disciples what had happened. He gave them three examples, which become for us in this study categories— different types of temptation. But that wasn’t the only temptation he faced there. He faced all kinds of temptation. “When he was done with every kind of temptation,” if you will, “he departed from him until an opportune time.”

Because this wasn’t the only season of temptation for Christ. He had to put up with it the whole time. Why? Because he was in our domain— the domain of fallen sin and temptation. And that’s what we’ve been having to put up with our whole lives. It’s what we were born into, and we don’t know any different than that.

Look back up, if you would, at verse number 5. “The devil takes him and shows him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and he said to him, ‘To you—’” he says, “—‘I’ll give you this authority and their glory’”— look at this statement now— “‘for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.’” And you may read something like that, knowing Jesus has said Satan’s a liar— he’s a liar from the beginning; when he lies, he speaks his native language— you think, well, he’s just bloviating on the fact that he’s somebody, but he’s really nobody. Don’t underestimate that statement. As a matter of fact, that statement is more true than most of us give credit for. He put it in these terms: “It’s been delivered to me. This world, this domain, is mine. It’s my playground. It’s where I do my work. It’s my office.”

So we need to start with this— just perspective-building— point number one on your outline, when it comes to living on this planet (and it’s the place you’re stuck on; I’m sorry): you and I need to recognize, number one, that we’re going to have a lifetime of temptations. Number one on your game plan: a lifetime of temptations.

This was a focused, concentrated attack on Christ, and he was being tempted. But here’s the deal: it was going to continue for the whole of his human existence here on earth. And it will be the reality for us, because it’s not just Jesus that’s tempted— it’s us, obviously. And, obviously, we fail more times than we’re willing to admit to one another.



Now, I told you to look at that verse in verse 6 about his claim that he has authority. I said it's more true than you may imagine. Let me give you a couple verses. We won't take time to turn to them, but I hope you're taking some notes— jot these references down. John 12:31— this is from the mouth of Jesus referring to Satan— he calls Satan “the ruler of this world.” That's the title Jesus gives Satan— “the ruler of this world.” Now, I know the words we just read in Luke 4 come from Satan's mouth. Jesus seems to affirm the reality of that, at least to some extent.

How about this one: 2 Corinthians 4:4. This is one coming from the pen of the Apostle Paul, when he speaks of Satan in these terms— he is “the god of this world.” The god of this world. Now it's translated with a small “g,” because he certainly isn't God— the God of everything— but he's the god of this domain. He's the leader, the boss, the ruler, as Jesus put it.

One more, and perhaps the most comprehensive: 1 John 5:19— another good reference to jot down. Here's what John the Apostle says: “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” Listen to that. There's nothing worse than thinking you're in friendly territory when you're in hostile territory. I mean, if you're not watching the news, for instance, and I say, “Hey, you've won a trip! You've won a trip to— where?— to North Korea. Congratulations.” That sounds exotic— let's go. Unless you're Dennis Rodman, it will probably not be a good trip for you. This is hostile territory. You're not going to go there and pack all your fun gear because it's not a germane place to your safety. It's not good. It's hostile. They don't like you there.

We need to more understand the reality of the hostilities against our Christianity here and now. And often we don't. There is more temptation in your life than you've even identified, because “the world lies in the power of the evil one.” Is God God? Absolutely. But he's given Satan a pretty long leash down here to do what he decides to do. And what he decides to do is not only move the world in a direction of increasing spiritual blindness and rebellion— because the ultimate rebel wants to create more rebels— but he's trying to get people like us who say, “Oh no, God is our Father; Christ is our Lord; we're all about him; we ally ourselves with Christ”— he loves to take those people in particular and put his sights on them and say, “I'm going to do anything I can for you to cast off the fatherhood of God. I want you to cast off and to violate the Lordship of Christ in your life.” That's his method.

I know you know this passage too; you don't need to turn there— but 1 Peter 5. You remember when Peter describes Satan, he says, “Listen, you need to be vigilant; you need to be watchful, because your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” See, now you need to understand— that's the desert that you bed down in, and every night you're sleeping in a place where the enemy wants to get at you— what for?— to devour you. What does that mean— to end your life? Well, really, he can do more with you alive than he can dead, because he can get you to defame the One you say you live for. He'd love to get you and make your life a



contradiction to the things you say you believe. He loves to bring dishonor to God— that’s the One he ultimately hates— by getting you to compromise, to lie, to do the things that he would have you do so that you can be a walking contradiction of the things you say you believe in.

He’s going to target you, especially if you’re going to stand closely with Christ. Did he go after the disciples? Well sure he did. Think about Judas for just a second— Judas. Now I know you think, Judas— whoo. I mean, not many babies in the nursery named Judas— have you noticed that? No one’s calling their kid Judas. Why? Because he’s the bad guy. The bad guy. No one’s calling— you’ll find plenty of Peters there. Think this through now: Satan went after both of them.

Let’s start with Judas. Judas— if you might remember, in one of the most chilling descriptions in the Bible— it says “Satan entered him.” And you say, “Well, he was a loser from the beginning.” Here’s the deal: the disciples didn’t think so. Do you know what his job was? John says he was the treasurer. He held the money bag. Now you’re on some homeowners association— I don’t know who you pick to be the treasurer, but it’s not the delinquent or the derelict of the group. It’s someone you think is trustworthy. It’s someone that you think you can rely on. That was Judas. He was this upstanding guy, it seemed at least, and everybody thought this would make a good disciple in the kingdom. But Satan entered him. He gives in enough to temptation for Satan to have his way. And right in that text it says the next thing he did is he went out to betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver.

Now, I’m going to say this throughout this series, and I’ve said it many times before: Satan knows your price. He’s got deep pockets, as I often put it, and whatever it is it’s going to take to get you to deny Christ, to get you to compromise what you say you believe in, he’s going to throw it at you. That’s what temptation is all about. He’s going to put before you the very things that are going to entice you to do something that is going to be a contradiction and a dishonor to the Christ you say you serve.

Peter— you see him as a good guy. You don’t mind naming our kids after that guy— he’s a good guy. Satan go after him? Yeah. And he had a lot of success with him too. At one point in Peter’s life, Jesus turned to Peter, and he said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan”— something you don’t want Jesus to ever turn around and call you: “Hey Mike— I mean, Satan.” Now what is that all about? Well, in that text, he’s aligning his priorities, as Jesus goes on to clarify, with the priorities and values of men and not with the priorities of God and the values of the kingdom. Get your values and your priorities all mixed up— do you see the subtlety of temptation there? Did he ever get Peter to deny Christ? Sure he did— so much so that he gave up on this whole thing for a while. Have you ever read John 21, where he says, “I’m done with this. I’m going back to fishing. I don’t want to be an apostle; I don’t want to be a preacher; I can’t do it— I’m a failure.” Satan has his way. Jesus said it one way so chillingly to Peter when he looked at him— he said, “Listen, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat.” Remember that? You’re city folk— I get that— you don’t sift much wheat. But



that doesn't sound very good. I don't want Satan to sift me like wheat. And Jesus said, "I've prayed for you—praying your faith won't fail."

See, that's the battle that we're in. And we often don't feel it. I want to prepare you for the next few weeks when we're going to dig deeper into this passage. And I want you to recognize that the temptations that you face—half of them you don't even recognize. We don't even see it. But Satan is after you and me—not so much because you're important to him, but the One you say you serve and love and stand for and want to follow—that One is important to him. And the rebel wants to create more rebellion in your life.

One passage on this—this is all we'll have time for—but would you turn toward the end of the Bible to 1 John chapter 2? 1 John chapter 2—let's go to Revelation and turn back a handful of small books, and you'll find it. 1 John chapter 2. Just to get into a little bit of the subtlety of this—and this is all by way of introduction—we're going to look at three major categories of temptation that we all face just by looking at the three temptations in the text: the, you know, stones into bread; the whole power play of "Bow down to me and I'll give you more authority"; and then the assumptions of, "Hey, you know, God will take care of you if you do this, because he loves you." And we've called this in the series—if you've read a little bit of the advertisement on it—we're going to look at our appetites, our ambitions, and our assumptions. And those are the areas that are spelled out for us by way of example in Christ's temptations.

But just by way of introduction, let's think about how all of that has kind of saturated the world itself in which we live. Satan has his way in the world, and the whole system of the world is really moving in a direction that he's very happy with because he's the god of the age—the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And you said you're going to stand out and live for Christ? Well then, if that's the case, you gotta be careful. You can't go with the flow.

1 John 2:15—do you find that? "Do not love the world," John said—that's the problem. As Jesus put it, you've been pulled out of the world; if you were of the world, it would love its own, but you can't be in love with this place—its values and its culture. You can't laugh at the things that the world thinks are funny. You can't value the things the world thinks are valuable. You can't prioritize the things the world thinks are a priority. You can't cheer on and affirm the things the world thinks that we should cheer on and affirm. It's a different place than the one you're living for. "Don't love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world"—you've got a problem. If you're going with the flow, "the love of the Father is not in him."

It's interesting to watch, especially with the birth of social media and Facebook and all that—everyone gets their own voice on the internet, and everyone can look at it all day long. One way I get to spy on you guys—careful when you friend your pastor—you get to see how Christians are



trying to live a Christian life in a very non-Christian world. That's not easy. It's easy, like the frog in the kettle that kind of gets slowly, you know, acclimated to the stream of sin— to watch people just start to pick up a lot more on what the world is all about. You know, love the things the world loves; value the things the world values; cheer on the things the world cheers on. Gotta be careful. This world is not a place that is friendly or positive toward the things we're supposed to live for.

“All that is in the world”— he breaks some of it down— think about it: “the desires of the flesh.” We'll say, “Whatever feels good— if that makes you happy, you should do that”— the impulses of your feelings. Now I get that— people say, “We want to applaud people doing what they want to do and to be free. As long as you're not hurting anybody, do what you want— lovely. Be who you want— just do it if you want to do it.” Isn't that how the first temptation began? Here was one prohibition— there was one tree in the garden— and God said, “Listen, let's affirm the fatherhood of God; let's affirm the Lordship of the King; let's let God be God.” And God says, “No.” And Satan comes and says, “Isn't that what you want to do? Isn't it good for food? Isn't it something that would satisfy you? Take it.” So, okay— who's going to tell you you shouldn't? “God's just trying to keep something from you.” That mentality— that's the world's mentality. And the Bible says, be careful— it's not of the Father; it's not of God.

“The desire of the eyes”— I want what I see; I want to see things that I like, and I want— those are the things I want in my life. I mean, it's the root of all kinds of materialism. It's the fixation on everybody's health and appearance and all those kinds of things. Be careful— that kind of value— not from God.

And then the last one— talk about Facebook being a window into this— “the pride of life,” putting myself up on a pedestal— it's all about me. It's about boasting in the things that I think are important that you should think are important about my life. Think about those things— they're epidemic; they're everywhere. And the Bible says next phrase— all that stuff's not from the Father; that's from the world. And as he says in chapter 5, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Verse 17— little perspective here: “The world is passing away along with its desires.” You want to go with the flow? You want to be like the rest of them? Hey, good luck with that— it doesn't end well. “But whoever does the will of God abides forever.” Whoever does the will of God— the will of God is moving in the opposite direction of this. It's like turning the wrong direction on a one-way street. Now, we don't have a lot of those here. I grew up in a place learning to drive where there are a lot of one-way streets— easy to turn down a one-way street the wrong way. And we got one in Dana Point right down there. That's one place— you don't have to raise your hand— but some of you pulled out of a parking lot there and turned the wrong direction. Now, the good thing is everyone is quick to tell you you're going in the wrong direction. They're happy to oblige and say, “Hey!”— flashing lights, and horns, and fingers, and all kinds of things come out when people start seeing you driving the wrong direction.



Now, that feeling, which most of us have—horrificed, right?—and then we don't want anybody to see who we are, and we quickly turn around—that's the feeling of being tempted the entire time in this life and on this earth, because God is saying you're to march in a different direction, toward a different goal with a different constitution and a different set of directions—the ones that will last forever—while the whole world has pinned up signs everywhere in this world saying, "One direction. One way. You want to be someone who thinks clearly and is open-minded, and, you know, you gotta think this way—you gotta move this direction: the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the boastful pride of life." Those are just categories again, but the kind of thing that we have to fight every single day.

Some of us, unfortunately, have been in the kettle so long and the temperature has been moved up so incrementally we don't even know half of the battles that we have to fight. Part of the series is going to be helping us to see that with our appetites, our ambitions, and our assumptions.

Careful: God has told us to drive against the flow of traffic. And as he's constantly reminded us, that's not going to earn you a lot of favor with the people of this world. Get used to it. America's had a nice little respite for a while, where it's been okay to be a Bible-believing Christian. Those days are over. Have you noticed that? It's time for us to wake up to the battle that we're all going to face and continue to face, and it's going to get worse. The Bible says things will go from bad to worse. Plan on a lifetime of temptations.

This text is about Jesus facing temptations and being victorious. I want to show you in this text something that maybe some of you have not recognized, and that is an outright contradiction from the way we're supposed to think about temptation. When Jesus taught us to pray, what did he tell us? He said in the model prayer we're supposed to ask God to "lead us not into temptation." That's what I want—I want to avoid it.

Look at the text again here in verse number 1: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil." If there's one thing you get clearly, it's that this is no mistake of stumbling into temptation. This is not trying to avoid the tempter. Now, it's the weakest of the three Gospels that gives this description. You can circle the word if you'd like there in the bottom of verse 1—it says "led by the Spirit in the wilderness." It's a little tiny Greek preposition, *en*, actually translated "in" in English—sounds like that in English—"in." And it just means "the Spirit led him in the wilderness."

A little stronger in Matthew—he uses the little word *eis*, which means "into"—and that's how the ESV translates it. Matthew wanted to make clear the Spirit was leading him **into** this temptation—



God was leading him into the temptation. Mark pulls out all the stops. He doesn't even use that word—he uses the word *ekballō*. *Ekballō* is a compound word: *ek* means “out,” and *ballō* is the verb “to throw.” Basically, that text says the Spirit of God **threw** him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil—*ekballō*. It translates it “drove him out into the wilderness.”

One thing all three Gospel writers want to make clear about this is that this was something God was making him do—pushing him to do. And, by the way, Jesus was willingly ready to face this. I know that in part by the way he does it—he fasts for forty days. He voluntarily fasts for forty days.

Now, we ended chapter 3 with a reminder that Jesus is the son of Adam. We talked about the problem of Adam being tempted in a garden—having to be well-fed, by the way, surrounded by trees—free from any of those trees. He had a prohibition, and Satan came and tempted him, and he gave in. Jesus now goes not into a garden but into a wilderness—into a desert—and he goes and purposefully starves himself for forty days. You want to talk about Jesus taking on the tempter with one hand tied behind his back? He did it purposefully. And the Spirit led him **into** temptation; we want to avoid it—he went in there to do it. Why? Because he was going to win the victory over the tempter that we as human beings lost and failed.

Put it this way—number two on your outline: we need to see our ultimate victory in Christ. I have a problem: I give in to temptation; you give in to temptation. We've got a long track record of sin—both prior to our conversion (which was much worse, I hope), and then after conversion (which is not as frequent, but certainly not laudable). We're not happy about it. We're ashamed of our sins and giving in to temptation. All of that Jesus came to fix. Why and how? Well, because he loved us, and he wanted to redeem us from the wrath that is to come. He didn't want us to incur the penalty of our sin. How did he do it? By facing the tempter and conquering him.

Now think about it this way—like a kid in the seventh grade getting beat up by the seventh-grade bully, and the next day his eleventh-grade brother comes back to school with him. Do you see the picture there? Adam got beat up by temptation. We get beat up by temptation. Jesus came to face the tempter head-on. God tells us to pray that we'll avoid temptation; Jesus goes—and the Spirit of God leads him—right into it, and he says, “Bring it on. Let's go—you and me. Tempt me—I'll even starve myself for forty days. You want to tempt me with a tree out there in the desert with fruit on it? Go ahead.” Jesus is going to win our victory.

This is such an important principle to catch. We often think about being saved by the death of Christ—and we all are right in focusing on that. Why? Because all the sin that I commit needs to be paid for by a just God. God needs to take human sin and pay for it with a human penalty, and he does it by humanly punishing Jesus Christ. But it's not just his death that saves us—you understand that? I try to say this often: it's also his life that saves us. Because not only do I have a problem of



my sin that needs to be paid for— I’ve got a problem of my life being much less than it should be— weaker than it should be, more sinful, more inadequate, lacking, falling short of the glory of God. I need **human righteousness** to be applied to me. And that’s what the temptation did.

See, when you failed and had a tantrum as a little kid; when you disobeyed your parents and lied about it as a sixth-grader; when you fell into all kinds of sin I don’t even want to talk about as a high-schooler; and when you sinned as an adult— all those things need to be rectified by **human righteousness**. If Christ came just to die for us, he would have showed up on Thursday and gotten crucified the next day. He could have done that. Certainly God could have done that— like the angels taking on human form and having meals with Abraham— it can happen. It’s just that’s not how he was going to do it, because he needed to “fulfill all righteousness.” Remember that in Matthew 3:15? When John said, “Why am I baptizing you?” he said, “Permit it so I can fulfill all righteousness.”

Jesus needed to face every temptation you did— like in a teenage body with raging hormones— and make the right decisions. As a little kid, he needed to make the right decisions and obey his parents. He needed to be honest. He needed to be ethical. He needed to be moral. He needed to take all that human righteousness that then could be transferred to you and to me, so that we could receive that righteous gift, so that when you stand before God, God can say, “Accept you.” So in the desert— when we start talking about temptation— it’s easy to feel really guilty and really bad, and we should feel guilty and bad. But when it comes to “How am I ever going to be right before God?” we need to look not only to the cross of Calvary; we need to look at the Judean desert and say, “Right there, our salvation was earned for us by a human being.” Is he God? Absolutely— one hundred percent God. But he was also one hundred percent human so that he could pay for my sin.

Sidebar for just a minute for some of you Sunday school graduates. Some of us are going to say, “Well, listen— how in the world can this be genuine temptation if Jesus is God, and God can’t be tempted by evil? I know James 1— God cannot be tempted by evil; he doesn’t tempt anybody. So this isn’t bona fide genuine temptation.” In theology, we call that the doctrine of the **impeccability** of Christ. What you need to know is that it’s not universally held to amongst theologians. A lot of people say— you know, Hodge, Erickson, a lot of others that we respect and look up to— say, “Well, that’s not how I see it.” The other side of that is called the **peccability** of Christ. And that’s the doctrine that several— albeit a minority— of theologians say, “Well, this is what I believe and affirm.” *Peccability* simply means that he **could have** sinned; *impeccability* says he’s **not able** to sin. Matter of fact, the peccability proponents like to put it this way: Christ was **able not to sin**. The impeccability guys say Christ was **unable to sin**.

If he’s unable to sin, it seems to take something off the temptation for us, doesn’t it? Well, what kind of temptation is it? Here’s what kind of helps at least balance out our thinking. If you grew up in a common, normal, traditional evangelical church, you were taught the impeccability of Christ.



Now all Christian theologians believe that Christ was sinless— he didn't sin— but they debate whether or not he *could have* sinned.

Now, here's the deal: Satan goes into the desert— he goes in, I don't believe (though some commentators will say this, because they hold higher the impeccability of Christ) that he went in as a victim— Satan did. I don't read anything in the text that leads me to that conclusion. He seems to go in rather hopeful and forceful. And I seem to think, if I read the text at surface value there, that there is this sense that there's some hope that perhaps the Holy One of Israel— the Messiah— will actually become unholy by the temptations of the evil one. That certainly argues for peccability.

Another thing that argues for peccability, in terms of the doctrine of Christ, is that people will say, "Isn't that exactly what he came to do— to reverse the problem of Adam?" We're born in sin. See, we are **not able not to sin**. We all are born wired to sin. Christ came— and the peccability proponents will say this— he came **able not to sin**. Who was the only other person able not to sin? Adam. Christ came as the second Adam— able not to sin like Adam was able not to sin but chose to sin; he came able not to sin, and chose not to sin. And that's why when you quote passages like Hebrews 2 or Hebrews 4, people then look at those texts and say, "What a powerful image that is— that the Christ that was able not to sin chose not to sin— knew the suffering of that; and even the anticipation of Satan to derail the human righteous decisions that we needed to be saved— he really thought perhaps," I'm suggesting, "that he could have derailed our salvation in that desert by making Christ sin." But instead, the enticements didn't work. And then he says to you and me— and we'll look at this later in the series, and you'll study it on the discussion questions in question three if you go through the questions— "Listen, Christ is able, knowing with sympathy and mercy the suffering of temptation, to come to our aid with the kind of compassion we would expect, to say, 'I know what it feels like to be in your situation.'"

Now, you need more than that, I understand. And I'm just suggesting maybe we rethink this a little bit. On the back, I always give you recommendations— any of the books on the humanity of Christ— they help you think through this. And whenever I put a journal article on there, like I did near the top of this list— most of those you can always find on the internet; you don't need the journals to read these journal articles. And I always try to list ones that are easy to read— and the one on the impeccability of Christ there is easy to read, easy to find on Google. Just punch in the title and you'll find it as a PDF out there if you need more on this.

Either way, let me say this: in his divinity, I understand we have a problem— mystery of the hypostatic union. We have divinity and humanity: one hundred percent God. If in his godness, if you will— unable to be tempted to sin, and he can't sin— in his **humanity**, though— that's what we need to rethink: the humanity of Christ. And I would say, because of the debates throughout church history, we've usually exalted and pondered the divinity of Christ a lot more than we have the humanity of Christ. And I try to provide some books to help perhaps balance that out in our



thinking, and it may be good to read contemporaneously with this series in the next few weeks one of those books if you're so inclined.

One passage on this— that was a sidebar— one passage, and if you turn to Matthew and turn back a few books to Zechariah chapter 3— Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, **Zechariah**, Malachi— Zechariah chapter 3, right before Matthew. I'm suggesting something that's not at all foreign to the Old Testament thinkers either, and that is that what we need is a kind of human righteousness supplied to us that isn't just taking our sins away and nailing it to a cross or some mechanism of payment, but we need the innocence that was pictured in the lamb that was brought to worship every week to sacrifice— we need that innocent human righteousness to be applied to us as well.

Zechariah 3 is a picture after the Babylonian exile. This is years after Moses and Joshua— the one we usually think of as Joshua. And now we have another guy named Joshua who's now the high priest. Now, you don't pick the jerk, you know, or the sinner, to be the high priest. The high priest is the holy man. He's someone who's obviously educated; he's devout; he's sensitive to the Spirit— all of that. He is the holy guy of Israel, if you will, of his day.

And Zechariah— this is an apocalyptic book, which means, like in the book of John, he's getting this vision and images of all these things— he says in verse number 1 that God showed him Joshua the high priest— now he recognized him, everyone knew who the high priest was— “standing before the angel of the LORD.” Are you with me on this? Zechariah 3:1. The “angel of the LORD”— if you went through our angelology series— you know that's a mysterious figure. Oftentimes (I don't think it's avoidable) we're probably referring to Christ in a lot of these passages. And this one in particular I think we'll see why in a second. So you see Joshua the high priest, and he's standing before the angel of the LORD, and “Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.” You got the picture now— Satan, Angel of the LORD, holy guy of Israel— Joshua— and Satan's going to accuse him: “Oh, this guy's a filthy, no-good sinner,” blah, blah, blah— whatever. Picture that.

“And the LORD said to Satan”— now, that's one of the reasons I think this is Christ. Why? Because “the LORD”— he's calling now the Angel of the LORD “Yahweh”— says to Satan— what does he say? “Yahweh rebuke you.” Now it's pretty schizophrenic because we don't understand the true unity of God. So we've got this Triune God; we've got Satan here being told by the Angel of the LORD (who's here called “the LORD”) saying, “The LORD rebuke you.” So I think Christ tells the Father— or says to Satan, “The Father rebuke you.” “The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you.”



Now he's going to respond to the accusation against Joshua— even the most holy among us— they're sinners, right? And that's what Satan is pointing out. Here's what I contend is Christ's response to Satan about Joshua the high priest. Read the rest of verse number 2 there— you see it: "Oh, come on— he's a really holy guy. He prays a lot. He's very sacrificial. I love this guy." You see that there at the bottom of verse 2? I'm being facetious. What does he say? Is this not "a brand plucked from the fire"? Now if you're waiting to have somebody defend you, and that's what they say— "He's just a brand plucked from the fire"— that's not a compliment. What's the point? Holy guy of Israel before God, accused by Satan, and the response of the Angel of the LORD— of God— is, "I know he's a loser." Oh man. Ouch. But isn't it the truth?

I remember the old line that said the preacher got up and he said, "If you knew how sinful I really was, you'd never want to listen to me preach." Everybody goes, "Ooh." And he said, "If I knew how sinful you really were, I'd never want to preach to you." We're all sinful. We all have things we're ashamed of. We've all fallen into temptation. Here's the most holy guy in Israel who is a sinner. He may be comparatively more holy than the next guy in Israel, but he's a sinner. And what does God say? "I know he is." Well, what are you going to do about it? Glad you asked.

Verse 3: "Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed in"— here's what sin is like— "filthy garments." Picture a white blouse or a nice white pressed dress shirt, and every time you sin, you get, you know, a glob of mustard thrown on it, or a little bit of mud, or refried beans jammed into the shoulder. So picture now how you look— every time you sin it's like that. Now I know Joshua— we can say, "Look at this big white spot— it's bigger than any big white spot you got on your shirt." Now he may be comparatively more righteous than you and I— I get that— but he's dressed in filthy garments. That's what sin is like.

"And the angel of the LORD," verse 4, "said to those who were standing before him, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.'" What are you going to do? "I'm going to take those sins away." That's what we often think of when we think of the cross— my sins taken away and paid for somewhere— on the cross. "And he said to him, 'Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.'" See, we often think about getting our sins taken off of us and pinned to the cross. We have a problem still— we need **human righteousness** applied to us: "I will clothe you with pure vestments." "And I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.'" This picture of clean thoughts, right? Give him that mind of purity. Well, that has to be credited to you from someone who thought pure thoughts through his whole life— Christ— who fought every temptation in his mind— Christ. "So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by."

That great picture— Paul loved it. The shorthand for it in the Apostle Paul's writings was: you and I are **in Christ**. He said it sometimes this way: we are **clothed** in Christ. He said that to the Galatian churches. "In Christ"— he said "in Christ" or "in him" 119 times in his letters to talk about the reality of when, by faith— as Philippians 3 says— you are by faith transferred into Christ, you now



are seen as all your sins removed, and you now are in the righteous human choices that Christ made. Where was that earned for you? In the wilderness— that was the temptations that you are seeing, now having been made properly— that you said “no” to every temptation because you’re wrapped in Christ. That’s the picture. Our ultimate victory is in Christ. We can all feel guilty about our lives— and we ought to. But when it comes to our salvation, it’s been paid for— not only on the cross, but by the righteous decisions every time Jesus was tempted.

Which, by the way, is different than every other religion that’s out there on the market today. You want to pick a religion— most of them, even in the name of Christianity sometimes, are going to give you a series of things to do in hopes that you’ll get good enough for God to accept you. That’s the most foolish reaction to any biblical revelation you could ever have, because God keeps trying to tell us, “I’m way too holy for you to earn your way into my family. I’m way too pure for you to try to clean up your act and rub out all the mustard stains on your garments. You can’t do it.”

Think about it. You ask people— even people who call themselves Christians— “Are you going to go to heaven when you die?” What do they say? “Well, I’m trying.” Come on. Well, you can try all you want. You clearly don’t understand the gospel. What is the gospel? That Christ for you not only died the death you should have died, but he lived the life you should have lived. And it’s all creditable to you. “Well, I’ve gotta work and work.” Listen— you don’t have to work; you have to **trust**. That’s what Paul says. When I trust and put my trust in him, I could be a dying criminal on a cross next to Christ— did I say this last week?— boom— I get clothed in Christ, acceptable that day, qualified to go into, as he said, “Today you’ll be with me in paradise.”

See our victory in Christ. We’ll talk a lot about sin— I know it’s going to probably pick a few scabs in your own heart— and you’re going to say, “Wow, I don’t want to think about my temptations and failures.” All throughout the series, please remember that the reason this is in the Bible is to remind us that Christ **conquered** temptation for us.

“So great— let’s sin it up, man— fantastic— don’t have to worry about making right choices.” Yeah, that’s my next point. I warned you this was all introductory, did I not say that? And that means that I’m going to have to go to the broad picture of Scripture to see why this text is here. Not only do we understand that Christ earned our salvation by saying no to sin and yes to righteousness every time— every time we failed, he did it right— but the Bible says, for instance, in 1 John 2, that those of us that make a claim to being **in him**— as John says, “If you claim to abide in him, then you ought to walk as he walked.” If you say, “I’m in Christ,” you don’t get a license now to go do whatever you want— now you have a mandate to live like he lived. As imperfect as you and I may do it— that’s your mandate: go live like Christ lived. How did he live when he faced temptation? Well, full of the Spirit, his brain full of the Scripture, he attacked his appetites, his ambitions, and his assumptions to think biblically and respond in a strong manner to win those temptations.



Am I going to do it every time? I guarantee you I won't. Neither will you. But the Bible asks us to step up and do this. Why? Because our salvation rides on it—I didn't say that—but because a lot **does** ride on it. Put it this way—you and I are going to have to fight: number three on your outline—**prepare to fight for daily victories**.

If the ultimate victory has been won, then why do I care about daily victories? Because God tells you to care about daily victories. Because to align yourself with Christ, then, is to try to live the life with the tools and resources that God gave us to see your life become increasingly more like him.

Now, the battle motif—and I used it in my wording here, “fight”—you see it all over the New Testament. For instance, when Peter talks about temptations, he says they are **waging war** against your soul. I mean, you really have to question me on this one? You know the war that's going on in your soul, do you not? You're being attacked every day by temptation, and all you have to do is be tuned into it with a heart that wants to serve God, and you see the conflict between your spirit and your flesh—and that conflict's going on all the time. What does the Bible say? Fight, fight, fight. You and I have to fight.

The whole motif—even in Hebrews 12—he says, “How hard are you fighting?” Not hard enough. “None of you have shed any blood in your resisting against sin.” We got a long way to go in stepping up the fight. Why? Lots at stake.

Let me give you four things really quick just to set up the rest of the series—four reasons that these battles that you're going to face tonight, tomorrow, this week, every weeknight, every day—you need to win them, because when you lose them, you're going to lose some other things.

Number one—jot this down if you would, letter A, if you will: 1 Corinthians 3:11–15—one of many passages that speak to this issue—that when we lose battles with temptation—put it this way, letter A: **we lose rewards**. Jot it down like that—we lose rewards. You and I lose rewards. Now I know what a lot of you communistic thinkers think: “I don't care—I'll just be happy to be there.” Man, I've heard that a lot. You don't mean it—even if you think you mean it. Look me up a hundred years from now, and you'll say, “I didn't mean that.” Because you'll care. You'll care because this passage says if you do not fight these battles and do the right things (which it analogizes with gold, silver, and precious stones vs. wood, hay, and straw), you've got decisions to make. And when you make those decisions—if you don't make decisions to follow God and do what he asks you to do—you will **not** store up those treasures in heaven, as the Bible says. You will be saved, yes you will—but you will **suffer loss**. Anytime God warns me that I might suffer, I want to avoid that. And here's the way to avoid it: for you to fight battles with temptation.



Now, the temptations that we think about aren't just the singular thing that comes to your mind every time. There are a lot of temptations that we struggle with that are much more subtle. Let me just read you this text real quick— 1 Corinthians 3:11: “No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid— which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation”— he's going to build on it with “gold, silver, precious stones,” or “wood, hay, and straw.” “Each one's work will become manifest”— apparent— “for the Day” (capital D— the day of our judgment, our **bēma** judgment— not the great white throne, but the **bēma** judgment) “will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire.” Here's the metaphor now, “because the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward,” which is a big deal to God and should be to us. “If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved— but only as through fire.”

Do you recognize that you are not going to want to stand there having your life reviewed and all you see is wasted stuff and stupid decisions? You're going to want to fight the good fight that Paul keeps telling people to fight— that Jesus here models for us— so that we can do the right things and have God richly reward you for it.

Now I know we think we're all okay with communism— you're not. Everybody tells me, “I'm not into rewards; I just want to be there— that's all I care about.” Then they go home and they tell their kids to work hard in school. “Work hard in school, Johnny.” Why? “Well, because they should.” Well, are you going to love them any less? “Well, no.” Are you going to divorce your kids if they don't? “No.” Why do they have to work so hard in school? “Well... let's just drop out— you're in the sixth grade— you've had enough— drop out— you're good.” Well, why won't you let your sixth-grader do that? Because, well, “I want them to reach their potential, maximize their gifts and talents, and I want them to do well in life. And you know, to do well in life, you gotta do well in school and do your jobs and your assignments.” It's funny how practical we are about **this** life and how impractical we are about the **next** one.

You really think the next life works any differently? We live so capitalistically down here, and we kind of hope that heaven is communistic— it's not. God keeps telling us, “Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven.” How about this oft-repeated phrase: “You will be rewarded according to your deeds.” I know that's a hard one for folks, but it is so in our face— especially in the Gospels when Jesus teaches us. You don't want to lose reward.

Number two— **we don't want to lose our usefulness**. Every time we say no to sin and yes to righteousness, we make ourselves more useful to God. Jot this one down: 2 Timothy 2:20–21. Here's what it says: “Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay— some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable”— in his own life— “he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the Master of the house, ready for every good work.” Somebody in your office that is ripe and ready to be saved and is set up for the gospel— and God needs to go to the



toolbox in that workplace and pull out a Christian to do the work— he’s going to look for the ones that are making progress in their sanctification, as this text says: cleansing themselves from what is dishonorable— holy, useful, set apart for the Master. You want to get to the end of your life and not only have God reward you, but you want to hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” You want him to have used you often in this world to do his bidding and his work. Don’t lose your ministry qualifications— your usefulness— by frittering away your Christian life with sin because you think, “Christ has conquered it all; I don’t have to worry so much about it.”

Number three— Romans 2:21–24. When you and I lose our battles with temptation, we begin to increasingly— I’ll put it this way, letter C— **lose our testimony**. We lose our testimony. Here’s how the text reads (v. 21): “You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (That’s contextual and historical— I get it— but there are a lot of things we say we’re against but we profit from and get pleasure from— wrong.) “You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”

Now, I know the cards are stacked against us. You can do eighteen good things in your office as a Christian, and the nineteenth thing that you do that’s hypocritical— that’s the one they’re going to point out. I understand that. But you see, when they do point out that walking contradiction in our lives, it’s a blaspheming to God. It’s dishonoring to him. That’s why they call us hypocrites. When our marriages are no better than the marriages out there, when the teenagers in our church are sleeping around as much as the teenagers at the public school, we’ve got no testimony. When our divorce rate in this building is just like it is out there— we don’t have the holy lives to hold up the holy standard of God’s word. We claim to follow a holy God and present this holy message— and our lives, if they’re contradictory— we lose our testimony. Our evangelistic assets are flushed as we continue to give in to our daily battles with temptation.

Number four— and perhaps most personally, in your own heart— **we lose our assurance**. Jot this one down— Hebrews 6:11–12. “We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness”— he’d just been talking about the importance of us doing what is right— “to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” We sit around as Christians claiming that we’ve got a relationship with God and our sins are forgiven and we have the Holy Spirit in our lives. When you and I give in to temptation, and we don’t have that battle being won as it ought to be— now, I know we’re not going to reach perfection— but when we don’t see the trajectory of our Christian life advancing, and then you lay in bed and you stare at the ceiling at night and you wonder, “Am I even really a Christian?”— I know you can go to a lot of churches and someone’s going to throw a verse at you and say, “Well, of course you are.” Not going to get that from me. Don’t come running to me for assurance when your life is a contradiction to what you say you believe. The bottom line is the Bible says this: “You’ll know them by their fruits.” If you’re doubting your Christianity because you’re losing every day— this battle with temptation— that’s probably what you should be feeling, because if the Holy Spirit lives in you, he wants to work in you to make you more like him. He’s



the Holy Spirit—he wants to make you holy. We can lose our assurance—and that’s not what God wants for us.

God, I think—and I will point this out, I hope adequately, throughout this series—is so ready, not just in the person of the Holy Spirit but in the person of Christ, to step up and help us. Think about it—he was in the battle more intensely than any of us ever will be; and according to Hebrews 2 and Hebrews 4, he is ready to sympathetically and mercifully step in and help us win this battle—as it’s put there in Hebrews—for us to receive the grace—the help—that we need in our time of need.

Now, I was often harshly harassed and confronted as a junior higher because they didn’t like my charming personality—but it usually started on the first day of class because of my last name. See, my dad was a cop in the neighborhood in which I went to school—which was really cool when I was in elementary school—but in junior high, it wasn’t cool at all. Especially because my dad was out there patrolling the area for things that a lot of my, you know, derelict junior-high friends were all involved in. They’d steal bikes—my dad would catch them and impound the bike. They would smoke marijuana—my dad would bust them and confiscate their marijuana. They would, you know—whatever—do all these things, and Dad was there patrolling the area, which wasn’t at all a good thing for me. And because I didn’t have the name Jones or Smith, I couldn’t really hide when they went through the roll the first day and said “Fabarez? Fabarez?” And all the real thugs would turn around and look at me with this “Oh, we want to kill you” look—“We know who you are.” They didn’t hate me for me—because they didn’t even know me—but they hated me because of whose kid I was.

Now my dad was, you know, incessant about saying, “Listen, son—do not get in fights about me. Don’t sit there and try to stand up for me. Avoid it, avoid it, avoid it—just try to avoid it.” But he would say, “If you’re cornered and you can’t get out of it, I want you to **win**.” Okay. And he would teach me a few things so that perhaps, in this fight in junior high, I could come out on top. And I had an older brother—four years older—and I had a lot of practice. And I felt like, okay—you know, I feel more equipped here.

The other thing about that is I always remember—this is before cell phones; I didn’t have immediate access—but I knew one thing: if I’m getting picked on and cornered by some bully in the seventh grade, because my dad is a cop, I often thought about the fact that my dad is a cop—he carries a gun and a big stick, and he’s got a bunch of other people along the police department that would love to go help rescue little Mike Fabarez from these people that hate him because he’s associated with the cops. I had a lot behind me in my own mind. I wasn’t going to win **every** scuffle in junior high—right? And I got on the bottom several times. But I had a sense of victory. I understood that, ultimately, the battle is won—I got that. And I also felt equipped that, you know, when I’m in the pedal, I’m going to do my best to win this battle.



You know, Satan hates you—and his demons hate you—not because of who **you** are; they hate you because of whose **kid** you are. You understand that. And Jesus did teach us to pray that we would not be led into temptation—and I'm telling you one thing he wants the most for you: to avoid it, avoid it, avoid it, avoid it, avoid it. But you will **never** avoid it completely. And you're going to be cornered—you'll be cornered probably before the day is over. And when you're facing the tempter and all his enticements, he wants you to **win**. And even if you don't—if you give in and you suffer what we all suffer from time to time: the guilt and the frustration of a lost battle with temptation—you remember who you're connected to. The battle really, ultimately, is already won when it comes to temptation and sin. Your sin has been paid for, and every human choice that needs to be made so that God can embrace you as his child has already been rightly made by Christ in a wilderness and through the entire life that he lived on earth. That's good news.

But there's some training we need to do—because we **do** want to win the battles. We need to win the battles—we need to win more battles than we've been winning. And I invite you back for the next three installments of this series to get much more practical as to how we can do that.

Pray with me, please—would you stand with me as we wrap this up?

God, thanks so much for just introducing our minds afresh to this very familiar chapter in the life of Jesus Christ, your Son, who met the devil head-on in the wilderness—not as a victim but as a conqueror. He went—as some commentators put it—on the offensive into the wilderness to meet the one who derailed the human race, so that he could fix the problem with an arsenal of human righteousness that could be applied to anyone who would put their faith in him. And, God, for that we're thankful. For as many times as we've felt defeated and beat up over sin, we're grateful that today we stand not on our own résumé, but, as Paul said, we've exchanged everything that we may have done that we feel good about for the résumé of Christ—to be found **in him**, not having a righteousness of our own, but the one that comes through faith.

So, God, we're thankful for that—that today, if we all were to drop dead on the way home from church, we're accepted immediately. There's no purgatory; there's no limbo; there's no stopping at a step to pay for something here. We get directly into your presence, and that, God, is a great, great, great thing that we rejoice in.

But God, for every day that we **do** live here on planet Earth, we know we're going to be faced with a lot of harassment. We want to avoid as much of it as we possibly can. We'd like to steer clear of all temptation. But God, when we get stuck—and we'll get stuck—we pray that we would fight much better, perhaps, than we have in the past; that we'd see what's at stake. We wouldn't want to lose these battles, because there's too much to lose when we lose.



So God, help us, please. Give us that perspective and a hunger to learn more from your pattern and example in the person of Christ in the pages of Luke chapter 4. Get us ready for this— make us hungry for it— and let it be profitable for our hearts. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.