



Temptation-Part 4

Guarding Your Assumptions

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I suppose that it is for comic relief that the supermarket managers still stock by the checkout the Weekly World News magazines. You remember those—the ones that talk about UFO abductions and mutants and aliens and bad boy—of course, you remember bad boy. And I must admit I’ve thumbed through them as I’ve waited in line at the supermarket.

But I’ve noticed this: when I read through these articles, it seems like a lot of these really bizarre claims are about events that are happening in some pretty obscure places. I mean, they’re always happening in countries like, I don’t know, Cameroon, or Estonia, or Paraguay, or some place that the average Ralphs shopper has never been to. That’s what I notice. And you see, that’s a good thing for the writers who are making all this stuff up, of course, because it’s easier to convince the naive that aliens are colonizing Slovakia, for instance, and that at night, after midnight, all the eyes of the residents of Slovakia begin to glow neon colors. I mean, you may have some luck convincing the naive of that because, of course, they’ve never been there and don’t know anybody who’s ever been there. So that can be passed off perhaps to the gullible among us.

And then, though, imagine that you’re reading the article about the colonization of Slovakia by aliens and the guy behind you looks over your shoulder and sees that word “Slovakia” in the headline and he says, “Oh, hey, I’ve got a cousin who lives in Slovakia. He’s an accountant, works at an accounting firm there, and oh, he loves Slovakia. What a great country, and especially this time of year. It’s so beautiful. And he loves to take his family on picnics there at the base of the Tatra Mountains in the snow-capped ranges—beautiful, idyllic. And he is a little concerned about the economy in Slovakia these days, of course, with their recent inclusion in the European Union and some issues with their finances. But oh, great country—love that place.”

To which you muster the gumption to ask him, “So do their eyes glow neon colors after midnight?”

To which he says, “Well, of course not. What are you talking about?”

“Well, that’s what the article says.”

“That’s ridiculous. Crazy. I’ve been there many times.”



You walk away, though, not convinced. You say, “You know, Slovakia just sounds like the kind of place that the aliens would colonize. I don’t believe that guy.”

That kind of ignorant conversation about the Weekly World News and Slovakia and aliens is the kind of ignorant conversation that I hear often as it relates to God. The kinds of things that are said are a lot like the people who would say, “Well, it seems like he’s the kind of God that would favor this,” or, “He doesn’t seem like the kind of God who would prohibit that,” and, “I don’t imagine God to be against this or for that or not wanting me to do this or not wanting me to do that.” There’s a lot of subjective speculation thrown about—imaginative speculation—as opposed to, of course, the more objective—at least the claims of more objective—information from those who have been there. The Bible calls them apostles and prophets.

And that raises an eyebrow. This is worthy of your research because the Bible sets itself apart not only by its claims, but by the evidence that shows that this book bears the marks of God’s own self-disclosing—that we call it God’s written revelation. And he does enough to put his imprimatur and signature on the things that we read, that we believe, as Christians have for centuries, that God does exist and has clearly spoken in this book we call the Bible.

Now, if you have speculation versus revelation—if that indeed is the two things we’re dealing with here—it doesn’t seem like much of a contest. We’re talking about your opinions and your ideas and your subjective feelings versus the objective truth that has come from God Himself. Well, you know—your ideas versus God’s autobiography. It seems like it shouldn’t be much of a debate in this.

Now, I would hope if you’re claiming to be a Christian sitting in a Bible church, you would say, “Oh, I’m all for that. I mean, let’s give deference to the Bible. It’s not about my opinions, not about my feelings—those ignorant conversations. I never engage in anything like that.” But I wonder if we’re really immune from the problem, because we often let our subjective feelings perhaps not pit themselves against the Bible in this complete dichotomy of God’s Word versus my ideas; but when we go to reading God’s Word—much like our reading of any large book—there’s often ideas that are drawn and conclusions that are drawn about a character, a lead character—I don’t know, whoever it is in the book—that we read in chapter, I don’t know, seven, that looks really different by the time we get to chapter thirty-three. And we start recognizing that the opinions that we form in one section of the book, they’re either adjusted or even overthrown by the time we get to another section of the book. And we’ve got to be fair about looking at the whole story before we draw any firm conclusions about this or that from what the book affirms or tests or states.



And unfortunately, our feelings get involved as Bible-quoting Christians when we say, “Well, I sure like that part of the Bible. I like that idea about God, and I feel good about what he says there. And that part I don’t feel so good about him. I don’t like the way that sounds, and I just like to ignore those verses.” This pitting one thing against the other is often driven much like the ignorant conversations of someone talking about God saying, “I think this is how God is because it just seems like God would be like that.”

See, when our desires and preferences and opinions and feelings start pitting one passage in our mind against another, and we start using one section of Scripture to either ignore or invalidate another part of Scripture, we are really doing the same thing, aren’t we? And see, when we do that, we let our emotions drive our understanding of God and his Word. Unfortunately, we can get to the place of making some pretty catastrophic mistakes in our lives.

That would have been the case in Christ’s life here in Luke chapter four as we read and study this third temptation of Christ in the desert. And if you have your Bibles, I want you to turn and look at this. I have printed it for you there on your worksheet, where Jesus is now confronted by the tempter about something that we’ll look at eventually here in this message—about a desire of his. But the way Satan goes about getting him to cross this line, step out of the will of God, and transgress the commands of God is not by just saying, “Don’t you feel like this would be a good thing to do? Isn’t your stomach grumbling? Why don’t you turn those rocks into bread?” And he’s not even saying, “Well, why don’t you bow down to worship me? I know that’s unbiblical, but why don’t you just do that to step outside the will of God to get what you want.” This time he starts quoting Scripture.

The third temptation—look at it with me in Luke chapter four, beginning in verse number nine—and see if this doesn’t begin to scare us, to think that some of the spiritual attacks that we face are happening when Bible verses are being brought to the forefront of our minds.

Verse 9: “And he”—that is the tempter—“took him”—that is Christ—“to Jerusalem.” Now, if you are really wanting to imagine this, I mean, we have a hard time figuring out: did he literally take him there? That seems a bit unlikely for several reasons. And even if he did, okay, that’s one thing. But all of these temptations start in our minds, do they not? I’m kind of doubting that Jesus took the trip from the Judean desert, some twenty-five miles away from Jerusalem, to go and follow the tempter there to this place—it would cause a scene anyway—to climb up on the pinnacle of the temple. But either way, you get my bias on this; but Christ is being tempted to do the thing that is about to take place, at least in his imagination. He’s being tempted as he’s set on the pinnacle of the temple.



And if you have looked in your maps in the back of your Bible and tried to picture that, you see the building that Herod had constructed, and it was tall in the back—that section over the Holy of Holies—and even taller in the front porch. But, you know, there’s debate as to whether or not that’s what we’re talking about, because there are sections over by Robinson’s Arch, over on the corner of Solomon’s Portico—if you really know the Temple Mount area—there’s a lot of places where you’re many, many feet above the stone pavement. Either way, what we get is: it’s a tall place, and the fall will certainly kill you. It’s a mortal drop to the stones.

And the tempter says, “Listen, if you’re the Son of God—you really are that, I mean, that was broadcast at your baptism—and I know that’s the thing that you’re saying in your own heart, that you’re favored by God, you know you’re the Messiah—well, then let’s see how this works. If you throw yourself down from here,” verse 10, “and let me just tell you, this would be biblically allowed, and here’s why,” as he quotes Psalm 91: “Isn’t the Bible promising you this—that ‘he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you’?” And in the next verse—that’s Psalm 91:11—and in Psalm 91:12, or verse 11, it says, “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ Isn’t God promising protection for those that he loves?”

“And Jesus answered, ‘It is said’”—now he’s quoting Scripture, Deuteronomy chapter six—“‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Now, a lot of critics look at us as having what they see to be intramural debates about the Bible. “Look at how this works—you got one passage, you got another passage; you’re saying, ‘I like this passage.’” That’s not what’s happening here. Jesus doesn’t invalidate Psalm 91. If you notice, we in your Bible don’t go from Psalm 90 to Psalm 92 because Psalm 91 was the devil’s psalm and it’s gone, right? That’s not how it works. This is a part of the Bible. It’s legitimate, and it’s truth. It’s just here Satan using Scripture and trying to have that passage be applied in a way that another part of the story, another part of the Bible, would prohibit. And the text here that he quotes in Deuteronomy 6 is very clear: you’re not going to put God to the test. And using a passage on God’s protection of your life as a license for you now to be reckless or jump off the top of the temple—that’s a misuse of that passage. There is a proper use to Psalm 91; we’ll look at that a little bit later.

“And”—verse 13—“when the devil had ended every temptation”—after forty days, and these three that are recorded at the end of the forty days—“he departed from him until an opportune time.” So he wasn’t done with him yet. But Jesus launches into his public ministry; we’ll begin that series next week, Lord willing.

Now, you read a lot of these without a lot of thought, if you do, and you say, “I don’t get the temptation here. What’s the temptation? Why in the world would Christ be enticed to jump off the edge of the temple, or the Temple Mount? It doesn’t make any sense. I mean, I can understand



being hungry and wanting to turn rocks into bread, but what's motivating this? Why is this a temptation?" That's a great question. And if you just put a bookmark in it for a minute, I want to get back to it.

What I want to do right now is just look at what's happening instead of why this is happening and why Christ would be enticed by that. I'm going to look at what's happening, and how Satan is tempting Christ—Scripture against Scripture—taking the Bible and using a part of it to avoid or violate another part of the Bible. That's what I'd like to call this morning "abusing the promises of God." This is a promise for protection, and Satan is suggesting that he do something that Christ rightly responds to as, "That would be abusing the promise of God." So let's put it that way. If you're taking notes, and I wish that you would, number one on your outline—let's jot it down: don't abuse God's promises.

Christ is not going to let that happen. He's not going to do it. And certainly, if we're to follow his example in temptation, you're not to do it. There are times we're tempted to do it. There are things that would be in our hearts and our minds and our path that would make us use part of the Bible to justify and rationalize our course of action. But we've got to resist that because we've got to know when we're taking a truth of God and using it in a way it was not intended.

I put three bullets underneath number one for you there. I've got three examples for you. And the first one's hardly an example because it comes right from this passage. And that is that in this text Satan says, "Here's a promise of protection—now use it." He's really saying, "Why don't you misuse it? Why don't you abuse it? Why don't you use it in a way that God did not intend?" And Christ corrects. So I want to look at that one, and then I'll look at two others just by way of example for us. But let's start with the first one and make it clear here exactly what Christ is doing: he's making sure that he doesn't fall into the trap of misusing the Word of God—or, as I put it, abusing the promises of God.

Let's jot it down this way—letter A, if you will, bullet number one: don't be reckless. Don't be negligent. Don't be reckless; don't go jumping off the top of buildings thinking God will protect. Don't be reckless in your life thinking, "Hey, God has promised to protect me." Now, I doubt you're going to climb up on any tall building being tempted to jump off of it just because of that. That's what makes the temptation here of Christ so hard to imagine. But there are things often that we'll do with a promise like "God says he'll protect you," to be lax in our lives, to fail to be vigilant in our lives, because we think, "I'm not being Christian if I do that."

Now, there are times—I suppose I'd like to turn to this passage real quick—Luke chapter 22. There are times, I'm sure, that you have seen in your life God do things that have shown that he cares for you and protects you. I mean, whether you—I don't know—you're overseas, you misplace your



passport, you leave it out; you go back to find your wallet in the plane; I don't know—whatever. Think of something. You're at the mall and you forget to lock your car and your wallet's left on the dashboard. I don't know how silly your example is. And you come back and go, "Whew." And I hope you say something like, "Thank you, God. Thanks for protecting that." And you think to yourself how good it is of God to look after you when you've done something like that that's left you open and vulnerable, and bam, God came through and protected your life, your valuables—whatever it was.

The problem is that we can turn that around, and we can begin to now put our guard down in a world that God never tells us to put down—except in one situation in the Gospels, that if you read it out of context, you are going to think, "That's the way I ought to live." Right here we get some clarity about Jesus sending his disciples out earlier in the Gospels and making them intentionally violate the clear principles of the book of Proverbs. He does it as a living illustration in their lives, so that when he puts everything back to where it needs to be—in terms of protection, vigilance, and self-discipline regarding their own protection—he then says, "I just want you to know, no matter how dangerous this gets, I promise to protect you. But you've got a job to do here. This is no license to be negligent."

Drop down, if you would, in this passage to verse 35—Luke 22:35. I was looking down to that passage. Remember the promises of Christ—I think of Matthew chapter 10, for instance—he says even the sparrow is not going to fall out of the tree without the oversight, the purview, the care, the sovereign care of God. And then he turns around and says, "Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." And that's a comforting promise of protection. I get that. That's great.

Look at how he applies this early in the ministry of the disciples. Verse 35: "He said, 'When I sent you out'" —Jesus says to the disciples—" 'When I sent you out'" —purposefully, now look at this; you might remember this; we'll get to this in the Gospel of Luke eventually, Lord willing—" 'I sent you out with no moneybag. Hey, leave your wallets behind. No knapsack. Leave your provisions in your backpack. No sandals—just wear what you've got; don't take any extras. Did you lack anything?'" I made you take your spare tire out of the back of your car and get rid of it. I had you leave your wallet at home. I said, "Listen, all the things that you might need to protect yourself—leave it behind." Now, how did it go? "We were protected." Great. Done with that.

Now, back to the principles we've read in the Old Testament; back to what you're going to teach from your pulpit as you go out as the apostles after the resurrection and the ascension, and you're out there leading Christians for the next two thousand years—get back to the principles we've seen from the beginning of the Bible. And remember this: you've got to be vigilant; you've got to protect yourself; you've got to have some defense in your life; you've got to have some planning; you better save some money; you better be thoughtful as you live this life because it's a dangerous place.



He says, “But now, let the one who has a moneybag”—you better bring your wallet. “And let him who has a knapsack likewise bring it”—if you’ve got a spare tire, throw it in the car. “And let the one who has no sword”—you want to talk about defense—“sell his cloak and buy one.” It’d be better for you to be shaking and shivering at night as you go about as pastors now in Asia Minor than for you not to have a sword. You’re going to need a sword. “For I tell you, it’s going to get real tough. The Scripture’s got to be fulfilled in me. I’m going to be crucified; I’m going to be numbered with the transgressors; for what is written about me has its fulfillment. I’m about to go be crucified.” And he said—the shepherd is going to be struck down; the sheep are going to scatter.

Now, when you scatter here, remember this: I proved to you that I protect you. I sent you out without any protection, without any money, and I took care of you. Now let’s get back to business as usual. If you don’t have a sword, you better get one.

Now, this is not a gun sermon, I hope you recognize. But if you don’t have a Glock in your nightstand—no—what am I saying? I’m saying this: for you to live your life in a kind of unguarded way is wrong. Why? Because God expects you to do your part—to make provision and effort, to be wise, to be thoughtful, to be vigilant. He expects you to do all those things—also behind it all with a promise of his protection.

Verse 38: “They said, ‘Lord, look—here are two swords.’” We’ve got a Beretta 9mm over here; we’ve got a rifle, shotgun. And he said, “That’s enough.” Great, fantastic. You don’t need a howitzer cannon. You don’t need an AK-47 behind every door. But great—fantastic.

Do you see what’s happening here? Christ is expecting his disciples to live with care and thought to his protection. Now, are they supposed to create Fort Knox with a shotgun across their lap? It’s not that he’s wanting. Why? Because the promise of protection is there. But we abuse the promise if you live your life as though it’s not a dangerous place.

Do you see what’s happening in this text? Like I said—not a gun sermon. We’re not asking you to go—whatever—buy your guns. I don’t care. This is Orange County. Just know: if you come crawling through my window late at night... upse—.

Bullet point number two, letter B: here’s another one. Don’t be lazy, thinking in your mind, “God will provide.” Don’t be undisciplined. Don’t be idle. Don’t be slothful, as the Bible says. Don’t be someone who never saves any money, doesn’t put money away in retirement, doesn’t work to do



what you can to save money for your kids' college—don't live an undisciplined life thinking, "Oh, God promises to provide."

I quoted for you earlier Matthew 10. Back in Matthew 6, Jesus said this: the Gentiles are running after all those things—what's the context? What they're going to eat, what they're going to drink, what they're going to wear. They're always worried about the things of this world. Don't you be like them, chasing after those things. "You seek first the kingdom" (quoting verse 33 of Matthew 6), "and all those things will be added to you."

Now, is that a promise of provision? Absolutely. Just like the promise of protection—God promises to protect us; God promises to provide for us. Now, you may not abuse much on that first one—keeping your car unlocked and your wallet on the dashboard in the church parking lot or the mall. I get that; you may not live like that. You got an alarm on your house, maybe? That's fantastic—great. That's a prudent thing to do.

But a lot of us live this way because of the desire, I think, for us to relax, chill out, take it easy—spend what we've got, save nothing, not work so hard, not really try to make ends. That is a stronger temptation for us that often leads us to say, "Well, you know what the Bible does say—God will take care of it. Not saving for retirement—God will take care of that. It'll be okay."

Now, listen, God doesn't want us to chase off after all those things like the Gentiles do. This is not my top priority. But it is a priority because it's a biblical, responsible, prudent thing that God's Word has always taught his people to do. But he sent his disciples out, did he not, without a money belt, without any wallet? Sure he did—to prove what? That even if you get without it—even if for some happenstance something happens, from the world's perspective, where all your funds get wiped out—I'll take care of you. I'll take care of you. Doesn't mean, though, that we can be lazy or idle.

Let's look at one passage in response to this—2 Thessalonians chapter 3. This may be helpful for you, especially in a world full of people that just want to look at one part of the Bible, and they're so eager to apply it, and then they take the other half of the Bible and they don't even care to look at that. Matter of fact, they'll call you ungodly, unsympathetic, uncaring, and non-compassionate if you really balance the whole of Scripture as you ought to and make sure that you apply God's Word as it ought to be applied.

Here's an example—2 Thessalonians chapter 3; let's look at verses 6 through 12. Paul says, "Now we command you"—this is 2 Thess. 3:6—"Now we command you, brothers, in the name of the



Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness.” Now, that sounds like an oxymoron—if you’re idle, you’re in a hammock. No, that’s not always the case. You see people a lot of times—he’ll call them later down there in verse 11 “busybodies.” They’re doing stuff; they’re just not doing anything gainfully. They’re not doing work to earn their living. They’re walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition—or the pattern—that you received from us.

What’s that? Verse 7: “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you.” And you know, if you know anything about the Apostle Paul, in the book of Acts, we find out he’s a tentmaker. Oh, he’s also a preacher and a missionary. But he’s out there making tents and selling tents in the marketplace, and he’s working a job. Why is that? He says, because we wanted to set an example for you. “We were not idle,” verse 8, “nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it.” We had money in our wallet. Why? Because we worked and we saved and we paid our own way.

How did you do that? With toil and labor—and delivering pizzas at night. Look at it: “working night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.” “It was not because we do not have that right”—we could have, as missionaries; we could have said, “Why don’t you guys support us here? We’re giving you the gospel, you’ve got to pay for our meals.” “But we wanted to do that—to go over and beyond our rights—to give you an example to imitate, because this is how Christians should live.”

“For even when we were with you, we would give you this command”—oh, watch here the parts of the pronouns. We (Paul and his buddies, plural first person) “gave you” (second person plural—y’all) “this command.” It’s not about you; it’s about a third person, and it’s a command. It’s what we call a third-person imperative. The preacher, in this case the apostle Paul, is telling the Thessalonians there are people out there that you’re not supposed to let them do something. Take a look at this: “When we were with you, we gave you this command: If anyone is not willing to work”—so we gave you the command—“if anyone” (those persons—the third person) “is not willing to work, then”—look at this—here’s the command, third-person imperative—“let him not eat.”

“I’m giving a command,” Paul says, “to where you can’t exercise another part of the Bible that’s very clear.” What is that? Be generous, ready to share, taking what you have and splitting it up—if someone has a need, you let them have it; be generous and kind and merciful and compassionate. “No, you can’t—not in this case. Not if the reason they don’t have enough is because they are not willing to work. If they are not willing to work, it’s sin for you to give them that.” You understand that? I cannot be complicit in your sin—your sin of what? If you’re idle and not gainfully getting out there to work.



And now you understand there's a difference between "can't" and "won't." You understand that. There's a time, obviously, where the principle of giving and sharing—absolutely—we need to kick it into gear. But if there's someone in your home fellowship group, for instance—everybody feels sorry for them, and every day, "Well, let's get together and help them out." Listen, the Bible does not let you do that. You're not allowed to do that if the person who is in lack and in need is not willing to work. See how Scripture has to be balanced, so that we understand the whole story? So that we don't just say, "Well, I know what the Bible says; I'm just gonna do it."

Now, again, that's not my direct application of this passage, because I'm thinking about the person—the third person—being us. What are those times when we say, "God will supply; God will take care of it," and often we expect other people who have worked and have saved and have done the right things to take care of us when we are presuming upon God's generosity and saying, "God will take care of me," and we didn't do the work that we should.

He says, "We hear"—verse 11—"that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage"—the word is to exhort, strongly implore—"in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work, and" stop moaning about it—"to do their work quietly and to earn their own living." That's the command.

So what's the point here? Well, you can apply it on several levels. But when it comes to what God expects, it is never for us to take the promise that he's going to provide and use that as a license to kick back and slow down and chillax and get your weight through the roof—whatever it might be. You have no biblical right to do that. That's an abuse of God's promise. Does God promise to protect? Yes. We can't be reckless or negligent. Does God promise to provide? Absolutely. But I can't be lazy or idle or undisciplined.

Thirdly—and you could make a long, long list—I'm going to give you three, and I'm going to jump down to the most important one of all. This one is probably the most abused and the most serious, heinous, heretical thing to abuse when it comes to the promises of God. Let's put it down this way—number three, or bullet point C, or whatever you want to call it: don't be sinful. That means I'm making a decision to do the wrong thing, thinking in my mind, "Oh, God will forgive. God forgives. God's a forgiving God, so I know that."

How does this work? The temptation is that here comes something in my mind that's even scriptural. For instance, Matthew chapter 26—Jesus raises up a cup. It's this modified Passover service, and he's creating the Lord's Supper as an institution. And he says, "This is the blood"—obviously it's not; he's going to call it later "the fruit of the vine"—but it's symbolic of the blood of the covenant. What's the word covenant mean, Sunday school graduates? Promise. The cup of the promise of forgiveness in my blood. So he is going to die, shed his blood, go to the cross; and the



promise is: because of my death in your place—you trust in me—here’s the promise of forgiveness. Just like God promises to protect and God promises to provide, God promises to pardon. He promises to forgive.

But if you think in your mind—perhaps even with a Bible verse—as you’re about to be tempted to walk into something you know is sinful, and you think, “Well, you know, 1 John 1:9—if I confess my sins, you’re faithful and just to forgive my sins and cleanse me from all...” And I know you’ll forgive. And you sin anyway—purposefully, deliberately—the sin of presumption in that regard is the worst and most heinous, most outrageous sin the Bible ever talks about as that’s applicable to modern Christians today.

Take a look at this, if you would—Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews chapter 10. This is a stinger. I’ve got to warn you. This is a hard passage to look at. But you and I need to be warned and exhorted from the Scripture that you and I cannot—cannot—sin presumptuously against the grace and forgiveness of God.

It’s one thing if you say, “Man, I ain’t buying no locks for my doors; I’m gonna trust God.” You know, I would encourage you as your pastor—don’t live stupid like that. And if you say, “Well, you know what? I’m not saving, and I’m not working hard; I’m gonna take it—God will provide for me,” I would encourage you as your pastor—don’t do that. That’s wrong. But all of those are very small compared to this one: if you walk into sin thinking, “I know God will forgive me,” there’s no bigger sin of presumption than whatever the sin might be.

I couldn’t help but put her name down on the back of the worksheet in one of the questions—Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia. In the 18th century, she’s being confronted about her sin, her autocratic, terrible ways as a leader of the nation. And her response was, “Listen, I know God will forgive me, because that’s his job.” When people speak in those terms—and it may never come out of your mouth like it did from the brash and hubris-filled voice of Catherine the Great—but if you, in your mind, have even Bible verses bouncing around that make you think, “It’ll be okay; God is a forgiving God; God is a merciful God—it’s okay”—I’ve had people say it to my face. But if you have it bouncing around in your heart as a thought, don’t blame God on those Bible verses popping into your minds. That’s the enemy at work, getting you to commit a presumption with sin.

Does it get more difficult to read than this verse? Verse 26—let’s start there. Hebrews 10:26: “For if we go on sinning”—look at this now—“if we go on sinning”—what’s the next word here?—“deliberately” (willingly, presumptuously) “after receiving the knowledge of the truth”—you know how this deal works: your sin on his cross; that’s the arrangement; you understand it—“then,” listen, “stop thinking that that cup is a promise of your forgiveness. Stop thinking that the blood of



Christ is in some way your sacrifice for sin. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sin” for you, “but only a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”

“I don’t have anything to look forward to in terms of forgiveness; all I have to look forward to, if I’m someone who takes the grace of God and perverts it into a license to sin—all I have to look forward to is judgment.”

“Hey, just compare the Old Testament,” the writer of Hebrews says. “Anyone who set aside the law of Moses—in the Old Testament—they died without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God?” “I’m not doing that.” Yeah, you are. You and I are trampling on the corpse of Christ outside the gates of Jerusalem after he was crucified. That’s what the picture is in God’s mind when you and I deliberately say, “It’s okay; God will forgive me; God understands; God knows—it’s okay; he’ll love me anyway.”

“And you have profaned”—what does that word mean?—you’ve made it like it’s not a big deal; it’s not special; it’s a non-special death; no big deal—“you’ve profaned the blood of the promise” (the covenant). You’ve taken the promise of God, and you’ve profaned it—you’ve abused it—“by which he was”—quote, unquote—or at least he’s claiming—“he was sanctified.” Of course he’s not; he’s lost; he’s going to hell, according to verse 27. “And you have”—this is worth underlining, maybe in red highlighter—“outraged the Spirit of grace.”

Is there a promise of grace? Yes. Is there a promise of forgiveness? Yes. But if you use those promises as abusive sinners—to sin because “I know God forgives”—the Bible says you’ve outraged the Spirit of grace. “For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’” And don’t think about converted people in that regard. This is a quotation from the Old Testament about the people of Israel who both were filled with people that were, as he put it in the Old Testament, circumcised of heart, and those who weren’t. He knows within the church—people who are Bible-quoting people—those that are his and those who aren’t. And he’ll one day, as it’s put in the New Testament, separate that like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. There’s a lot of people that will say, “I was in church; I did this and that,” and he’ll say, “Depart from me; I never knew you, you who practice lawlessness.” And they often do it with a Bible verse in their minds.

“It’s a fearful thing,” he says in verse 31, “to fall into the hands of the living God.”



I told you that was a stinger. If you think about it, there's no greater abuse of the promise of God than abusing the promise of forgiveness and grace. Don't be sinful thinking "God will forgive." Don't be lazy thinking "God will provide." Don't be reckless thinking "God will protect." And you can continue the list in your own study, because there are plenty of promises that are abused every day by Christians and poll groups and a lot of other folks.

I said put a bookmark in your question about why in the world would this be enticing to Christ—to jump off the top of the building. Let's get back to that now as we think about verse number nine. The tempter's good at what he does; he wouldn't waste his time with something that wasn't an enticement to Christ. He takes him, in verse 9, to the downtown center of Israel—Jerusalem—sets him on the pinnacle of the temple—the main building in the downtown skyline, if you will. He says, "If you're the Son of God, throw yourself down." For what in the world would be the temptation in that? "You're throwing Scripture out saying you'll be okay if you do this—do it."

Let's jot this down as number two, and then we'll unpack it. Let's put it in our context so we can think about our own application, but let's then back up to that historic situation and find out why this is an enticement to Christ. Number two: we need to know or understand why we'd want to twist the Scripture. Why would Christ ever be enticed to take Psalm 91 and think that, "Yeah, you're right; I could jump off this thing, and I'd be okay"? Why? He's not twelve—you know—what in the world would be the thrill of that? This is not—this is not—and it has a purpose.

Here's why Jesus, I think, would want to twist Scripture and be enticed to do it in his humanity—by Satan. I want you to think back now. First one: turning stones into bread. Get that—everyone can identify with that: you're hungry; step outside the will of God to satisfy your hunger. The second one was: get the kingdom that you were destined to get—and that is the kingdom of the world. As Revelation says, "The kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ"—that's Jesus—and he will reign forever and ever. You are going to get the kingdom. Now, temptation two said, "If you just bow down to me, I'll give it to you. I have the right to give you this; the oversight and administration of the world has been given to me; I give it to whoever I want." Remember that last week? "Here—have it." Now, he says no to that. And the arrangement was: "You just worship me. You let me give it to you; you can have it now." And why is that advantageous? Because you won't have to go to the cross.

And there was nothing more egregious in the thinking of Christ than thinking about going to the cross. And when Peter even brought up the idea, he looked at his friend and called him "Satan." "Get behind me, Satan." In the garden, he's sweating, saying, "If the cup can pass from me, let it pass." So we know it's a temptation for Christ to avoid the cross—that's a temptation.



Temptation two was “Just worship me and I’ll give it to you.” No. Here it is again: you can have the kingdom without the cross. And I don’t have to give it to you—I know that’s distasteful for you to think of me giving it to you. How about this: I don’t give it to you. Let’s just let you jump off the pinnacle of the temple; the people will see this miraculous, ostentatious display of your divinity; they will worship you; they will make you king; you can have the kingdom without the cross, and I don’t have to give it to you—they will want you, and they’ll take you for themselves.

Why is that? My theory on this—and I know commentators disagree on it—here’s one of the reasons both Matthew and Luke make it very clear (the two that describe this temptation) that it has to happen here in downtown Jerusalem. Unlike your images in your mind—for some of you that see this in some miniseries on television—you think, “Well, this could have happened on a cliff somewhere in the middle of the Judean desert.” Can’t happen there. Why? Because no one would see it. And it’s not about a twelve-year-old getting thrilled that he can fly. That’s not the point. What’s the point? Prove yourself to the people so they will embrace you and usher you into the kingdom as the King. It has to happen in front of people; it has to happen in front of an audience. People have to see it.

Now, you’re in Luke 4—look down. Let me just show you something that—temptation being what I’m just suggesting that it is—may help you figure out some curious verses that we always run into when we study the Gospels.

Look at verse 41, for instance—we’ll get to this soon in our next series. He casts out these demons, and many of them were coming out, crying, “You are the Son of God!” And he said, “Oh, fantastic, could you make sure everybody knows that?” Is that what he says? Verse 41—Luke 4:41—that’s not what he says. He rebukes them, and he would not allow them to speak. Why wouldn’t you let them speak? Because they knew that he was the Christ. Does that seem so counterintuitive? We’re going to get into a series called “Presenting Christ.” Don’t we want to present to people that he’s the Christ? Here are the demons going, “Yeah, you’re the Christ,” and they’re saying it out loud—and he says, “No.”

Across the page, chapter 5 verse 14—look at that paragraph there where he heals the leper. Luke 5:14—do you see that? He charged the leper, in verse 14, after he heals him—he says, “Tell no one.” Now I’m thinking to myself, if you want people to know that you have the power to reverse disease, you’d want people to know that. He didn’t want people to know that. “Don’t tell anybody. Just go to the priest and offer what Moses commanded for your cleansing.”

Just like Moses said. Go ahead to chapter 9, and maybe this will make it clear. Luke chapter 9—we could go through all the Gospels and see the same pattern. Verse 20: he says to his disciples—you remember this memorable scene—he’s sitting with his disciples and he’s saying, “Who do people



say that I am?" And then he says, "Who do you guys say that I am?" And Peter answers, verse 20, "The Christ of God." Oh, now we've got it! Can we put that on a big billboard? Can we print that out on a banner—make sure everybody knows that? No. Verse 21: "He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one."

Why? Verse 22 helps. We can understand it now. "The Son of Man must be accepted, must be exalted, must be made the king"—somebody says. No—"must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." You see, the decision that Jesus is facing is: Do I allow these folks to hail me as king and exalt me as king in this ministry? Because if they did, there'd be no cross. I've got to be able to do my job as the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world and come as a sacrifice. They have to kill me; they have to make me suffer; and they have to reject me. Therefore, I can't sit here and make sure everyone knows my miraculous credentials so everyone can hail me as king.

In the margin, it'd be worth jotting down John chapter 6, verses 14 and 15, because while those are pretty clear, this is crystal clear. John 6:14—"When the people saw the sign that he had done" (he'd just fed the 5,000), "they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'" Verse 15—perceiving Jesus that they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, it says Jesus then withdrew again to the mountain by himself. You're running away from people acknowledging you as king? Yeah. Why? Because we can't have the kingdom without the cross. God's plan is not to step outside the will of God to have the kingdom without redemption that requires suffering and rejection and death. That has to happen. Therefore, I'm not going to go jump off the pinnacle of the temple—though it would be enticing for me to skip the cross and get the kingdom without it.

Are you still there in Luke chapter 9? Look at the next verse as he turns it to us in verse 23. He just said, in verse 22, I've got to suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, third day be raised. Verse 23 of Luke 9—he said, and then he said to them all—now he turns to them—"If anyone would come after me"—we looked at this earlier in the series—"let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."

Now, why in the world—here was the question put before us in the second point of the sermon—why would I ever be tempted to twist the Scripture? It should be clear—I've already kind of suggested it in the first point—because I don't want the pain. I want to avoid pain. I don't want any of the pain in my life. And sometimes following Christ requires a daily sacrifice of some kind. And if ever I could find a passage of Scripture that would relieve me of that obligation or responsibility, I want to use that—because I don't like pain; I don't like the cross.



And I don't like—look what he says there when he starts this in verse 23—"If anyone would come after me," first thing he says, "let him deny himself." I don't want to deny myself. Is there any way I can take a passage of Scripture, facing the thing that I'm sitting in front of that I really want, that I know is not the right thing—is there anything in the Scripture that would help me justify that, so I can have what I want and have it now? Just like Christ: "You want the kingdom? Have it now." No—there's a pathway; there's an appropriate way; there's the right way; there's God's way.

And think about that concept of work we brought up as an example—we can't be lazy thinking "God will provide." Think about how often our desire is to relax and chill and cut back and not work so hard. Some of the complaints you get about your Christian life—is it not that you're too intense about it all? (Smile at me if that's the case.) They think I'm crazy. And here—wouldn't it be great if some guy—this has probably already happened—can come up to you and give you a Bible verse and says, "Relax, man—chill out. Here's what the Bible says: it's all done for you, man. You don't have to work so hard; God's done it all; you just gotta relax." You can see that. I've heard it many times.

Wouldn't that appeal to my flesh? Well, sure it would. But is that what the Bible teaches? Oh, the Bible does say over here that God is at work in us. He works in us; he animates every cell of my body. And when something good comes out of my life, I can credit God with working in me both to will and to work for his good pleasure. But you do know the verse that I'm quoting—Philippians 2:13. Philippians 2:12, the beginning of the sentence, starts this way: "Work out your salvation." See, now if I can just focus on the last part of the sentence, then I can avoid the first part of the sentence. And that's what I don't want. Whether it's being an employee or an employer, whether it's being a husband or a father or a Christian, I'd prefer to have a verse that would let me relax a little bit more. And yet the Scripture says, "Listen, we understand the balance of Scripture—we get it. God is at work; God empowers; God motivates. But God is also calling you and me to work"—just like he's calling you to be vigilant, just like he's calling you to be someone who recognizes sin as something to be avoided—not "forgiveness is just something that's granted so I don't have to worry about it; I can sin as much as I want."

Understand why we'd want to twist Scripture, and you can go and make your own list—there are so many examples of this, and the discussion questions on the back, I hope, will help you think through it: Why is it that I want to compromise some passage of Scripture utilizing another passage of Scripture? What are your motivations? Several—and there's an example set of examples there.

Now, back in our text—Luke chapter 4, verses 10 and 11—let's end this this way. We need to understand then: if Christ is not invalidating Psalm 91 as something that we should cut out of our Bibles as Satan's chapter—well then, what's it there for? Why do we have that? Apparently, Satan is recommending a misuse of this promise. Well, what's the proper use? Because Jesus isn't trying to say, "Psalm 91 is wrong." He's not trying to say that. He's just trying to say, "What you're trying



to get me to do based on Psalm 91 is wrong, because something over here in Scripture says that wouldn't be right; that would be testing God."

So why in the world would God promise that I would be protected? Why did he promise that I would have provision? Why did he promise that I would be forgiven? What are they there for?

Before we answer that, let's think about the sermon so far. There are some people that listen to this sermon—and they hate it. Happens every week. But let's just say—okay—why do I hate this sermon this week? Well, I hate it because what you're taking away from me is all the excuses that I've built up in my life—and I think they're biblical because they have verses attached to them—that let me relax, chill out, be lazy, whatever—undisciplined, whatever—sin and know "God will forgive me." It's corrected that. Now, that's a group of you that say you've got to deal with this sermon because what I'm trying to do is get you to recognize you can't use the promises of God as a license to do something wrong.

Some of you, though, are sitting in the sermon liking the corrective far too much. "Oh yeah, man. That's why we're shopping for guns this afternoon. And that's why I'm working overtime; I'm going to take that job and work three jobs. And you know—that's why, when it comes to sin, if I do something wrong, man, I'm climbing the steps of the church on my knees till they're bloody, doing penance." You have a cheerful response to what we've said so far because you think all those slackers in the church need to get with it.

So I'm saying—wait a minute. The promises are there for a reason. What's the reason the promises are there? We want to get Psalm 91—like we would every other promise of provision, protection, or forgiveness—in context. We want to know why they're there. As the old seminary professors used to say, "A text without a context is a pretext." You ever heard that? It's a good one. A text of the Bible without the context—knowing the context, not only the immediate context but the full breadth of the context of the Bible—is a pretext. That's what the sermon's about: it's an excuse of presumption upon God; it's using it to cover up a sinful action. You can't have a text without a context.

So let's look at the context. Let's just read the whole thing. We'll read the first verses, then we'll write down our point, and then we'll read the rest of it. Ready?

Psalm 91—this is where that quote was from. This is the psalm Satan chose to quote to Christ. Let's see the whole thing:



“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

“I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

“He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.”

Jot this down, if you would—number three: all of his promises—of protection, provision, and pardon—are so that you would live fearlessly, not presumptuously. That would be the abuse. He wants you to be without worry. He wants you to recognize this: if everything falls apart, God’s protection is promised to you—not that there’s not a Christian that doesn’t die on the battlefield (as we’ll see, much of this is about the battlefield). Clearly they do. But if a bird doesn’t fall out of a tree dead without the oversight of God, then certainly the arrow is not going to get through the front line and pierce your torso without God’s sovereign oversight. So you’re immortal—as I like to say—until the day that God has destined for you to be gone from planet Earth.

And what does that mean? I can live recklessly? No—no—that’s what the whole sermon is about. It’s not something I can use to abuse the promises of God. But it is something that brings me peace.

Think about the promise of provision. I’m going to work hard; I’m going to save; but you know what— a lot of times the stuff we save doesn’t get as far as we thought, and the investments we make don’t go very far, and the house you buy—you think it’d be a great investment for your retirement—and now you’re upside down. A lot of times you do your part, you do your best, and it turns upside down. What’s the promise there for? Relax. Don’t worry. God cares.

What about forgiveness? That’s the weekend music. These promises were not given for us to test them. The promises were given to give us peace, so that you can stand in your own heart knowing that if I were to die today in a traffic accident on the way home from church, I would stand before the living God because of my trust in Christ, and I would claim the fact that there is no condemnation for those in Christ. I’m not going to hell. What’s the promise there for? For you to abuse it? No. You have forgiveness. It’s there to bring you peace.



Keep reading—here’s the point, verse 5: “You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side; ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

“Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

“On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

“You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.”

Listen to protection. Don’t worry. Don’t be anxious. Now, do we abuse those? Do we? Are we going to bring snakes to church next week and pass them around like they do in Kentucky, or whatever? No. We don’t have lions in the nursery down the hall just because we trust “God will be okay.” No. But we recognize: if it got really bad—no matter how bad it got—we’re not outside the purview, the loving, sovereign protection of God. There isn’t a person that’s going to be bitten by a snake that’s a Christian who loves God that’s not within the plan of God for your life. That—that’s the peace we have.

Because now God talks in the first person—verse 14: “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble.” We’ve been reading in the Daily Bible Reading—if you’re following us as a church—here in the life of David. I mean, not until today (I guess this morning’s reading) when Absalom’s insurrection has been quelled. I mean, we’ve just had such a rocky road for David and such terrible things have been happening—from his anointing to his... to where we’re at now, where he’s finally gotten past Absalom’s rebellion. And if you think about all that—did David have no trouble? He had all kinds of trouble. But the promise of God is: “Listen, I’ll be with you in that trouble.” David—he marches out of Jerusalem with the rebellion of Absalom—“If God’s with me, it’ll be fine; we’ll be back.” There’s the life I want. No matter how bad it gets, I’m at peace in my heart. Why? Because he trusts in the promises of God. That’s what they’re there for. “I will rescue him and honor him,” verse 15. Verse 16: “With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”



Is that a promise to be tested? No. It's a promise to give us peace—to let us be fearless in our Christian life.

Speaking of fearlessness, I think of when my boys were young. They're at that stage when they're real little that they're scared of everything. They're scared of the dark, scared of noises. But it's amazing to watch the transformation when they're walking somewhere with their dad. Doesn't matter how dark it is—especially when they were little; we had both on both hands, both sides. No big deal. "Darkness? Huh—who cares? It's just fine." "Well, you weren't fine last night in your room." But now you're fine. You're fine now because you're with Dad. "That little loud noise down there, shadows in that little alley—doesn't matter." Even if a noise does startle them, I squeeze their hand; they look up at me—"It's fine." Dad's here. It's fine.

That's the intimacy that God wants us to have with him. And the promise of his protection, his provision, his forgiveness is to give us that sense of relational security with the God of the universe. But you understand, when we look at that, the other side of that coin is what it does to us when we face temptation. Because when I get home from work, when the kids were that age, and I hear the stories about what they did when they were by themselves in their room—smacking each other around, and this kid's got a fat lip today and a black eye—I think to myself, "Listen, when you're walking down the street hand-in-hand with your dad, ain't none of that." You're going to be tempted to slap each other around—probably, just because they're two little boys—but they're going to show a lot of restraint because Dad's there. So when it comes to insulting your little sister, are you going to do that—mock your little sister—with your dad there? No; not going to. I wouldn't dare. "You're going to do something like you did down the hallway when no one was looking?" You're not going to do that with Dad standing there.

You see the good thing about fighting temptation when it comes to the promises of God? I mean, this works—it works right into the hand of God. You want to quote Psalm 91, Satan? Fine—quote it away. It doesn't lead me to abuse the intimacy and presence of God by saying, "I'm fine; I'm okay; I can do what I want." It reminds me of the presence of God, the closeness of God, the watchful eye of God.

And that most heinous and dreadful verse—Luke 4:13—when it says, "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time," reminds me that Jesus had to deal with this kind of thing his whole ministry, and you will too in your whole life. If you're an eighteen-year-old Christian in the auditorium here—when you're eighty-three, if you make it that long—you're still going to be dealing with the attacks of the enemy, and you're still going to be tempted to use the Scripture in the wrong way in your own mind to justify and rationalize your sin.



But here's the good news: Christ says, cling to him—right? Look to the Father; walk hand-in-hand with him. He wants to give you not only the promise of protection, the promise of provision, the promise of forgiveness—and a lot of other ones—but he wants that presence to be that kind of resilience, that kind of fortitude, that kind of resolve. “Listen, I’m walking with Dad there; I’d not dare walk down that wrong path.”

God will strengthen you. God will help you. God will have you lock arms with your siblings and find strength in the community of Christians. I know temptation is strong—I understand that. Christ understands that.

But remember this last section of Jude—that little book—when he says, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling...” That's the good news. He's ready. He's able. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “There's no temptation overtaken you except that which is common to man; and God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.” He's able to give you that way out that he goes on to talk about. He's able to keep you from stumbling—and I love this—“and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.”

It would be good for us to look back on the trajectory of our sanctification and Christian life and see that God kept working in us—increasing victory over temptation. I mean, I know this series has just barely scratched the surface on this vast topic. But I hope it's equipped you to be a little bit stronger in your walk with God—whether it's your appetites, your ambitions, or the assumptions—the wrong assumptions—we can often make about God and his work.

Let's pray.

God, help us as a church that does want, I hope in increasing measure, to live a life that's pleasing to the Lord. We want to discover what's pleasing to the Lord, as Ephesians says, and we want to do what's pleasing to the Lord. And God, forgive us, please, for the way we haven't managed our ambitions, or the way we have uncurbed appetites that we haven't managed, or even, God, our assumptions that have kind of run amok as we just find ourselves quoting passages of Scripture just to give ourselves license to do the wrong thing.

Let's be much more careful about this—not just so that we can avoid the problems that come with sin (we do want to avoid those), but we want to bring you glory and honor. It's kind of like—speaking of earthly fathers and sons—as the Proverbs say, there are few things that bring joy and happiness to a father's heart than an obedient and God-honoring son. So please, God, let us bring that kind of joy to your heart as you see us saying “no” more effectively to sin and temptation in our



lives, and you see us conformed more and more to the image of your Son as we pursue righteousness as we ought to—with the kind of vigor and the kind of enthusiasm, the kind of tenacity that you'd want to see in your kids who are pursuing righteousness.

So, God, thanks for this series. I pray it would do good things in our lives and bear much fruit in the weeks and years to come. In Jesus' name, Amen.