

“Temptations!”

Our Foolishly Flawed Fantasies & Our Father’s Faithful Facts of Life

Temptations are conceived in *self-centered cravings for selfishly driven satisfactions*, while ignoring *others’ welfare*, and with a dire lack of gratitude for the most gracious gift of all, *God’s Incarnation of Himself in Jesus*, who willingly gave up *his life* in a torturous crucifixion, to save *us* from *eternal death* in our sins, *to give us God’s gift of eternal life*.

Temptations are all *bound up in narrow-minded self-centeredness* that blocks recalling the *traps* of previous temptations that led, not only to inevitable disappointments, but to what was, in so many cases, *so, far worse*. Still, we tend to try to *get away with* plowing bullheadedly, headlong into our next foolishly obsessive scenario’s disappointments.

So, shall we wisely dismiss our temptations before our temptations deceive us again? Will we never learn that *temptations are loaded with dirty tricks*? *Trickery is temptation’s “thing”!* These *tricks* captivate our clueless curiosity, enthusiastic naivete and our willing pursuit of egoistic “*advantages*”, even when we’ve already “been there” and “done that”, so many times before, *before* our camouflaged *evidence “spoiled”, i.e., informed [!] our woefully fictionalized forecasts* for our *lusted “advantage”*, that, as idiots, *we’ve all*, so repeatedly, pursued so *shortsightedly*, thus, *irrationally*, and very *stupidly*, down every harebrained rabbit hole of *hopeless “hope”*, one after another, after even yet another.

Temptations’ deceptions *seduce* us into *blindsided messes*, over and over again, *until a few of us may finally come to see* that such shortsighted *scheming* for what we merely *fantasize*, is *daydreaming* that can quickly turn into nightmares. Temptations are *traps* into what we *blindly envy!* *Scamming ourselves, catches us up, with our pants down!*

How come we so rarely *learn* how *devious temptations really are*? Simply put, it’s *because*, in the throes of misguided temptations, we seldomly *pause to wisely consider* that, we’re chasing after what is, *yet*, an *incomplete “come-on”*, further details of which are *yet to come out*, since, as such, they’re now *unavailable -- though, from experience* and with *willingness to learn* from experience, we *may sniff* them *out* beforehand, on the basis of what we’ve *smelled* of such a *familiar stench*, so very many times before.

All *experience* is, after all, *full of clues*. But *we try to camouflage* these *useful clues* for we take them to be *roadblocks* to our *fantasies*. Of course, one *can’t* camouflage what one *must* be able to see in order to even *try* to keep it *hidden*. So, we can’t *really ignore* what we’re so *willfully*, but *foolishly “ignoring”*. *If we learn* from experience, we can prevent ourselves from *tumbling repeatedly* into such predictable *consequences*.

We’re surrounded by *scammers* that we need to spot and avoid. But, let’s all keep a lookout for *our scamming ourselves* into *ignoring* recognizable hints of *self-fraud*, so we can *prevent* our chasing after all we so *foolishly fantasize*. What we *refuse to see* in our *damning temptations, is provided* for us by *wisely recalling* some *previous temptations*.

Isaac Watts so helpfully advised us in such quandaries of life: “Acquaint yourself with your own ignorance.” His wise advice requires *savvy recollections* of what we tend not to *want to recall*. But such recollections can *save us* from *habituating* such foolishness.

We all know, of course, what some of this “ignorance” is about, but again, we foolishly try to distract ourselves from what we know, so as to have it *all go “our way”*, which, of

course, will *never pan out* as we stubbornly try to *make it pan out*. With *temptations*, we must know how to diligently, truly, *admit* what we so *foolishly don't want to recall*, that's then, so predictably *self-defeating*. We need to *prove* that, *indeed, we're not such fools!*

Catching ourselves in *daydreaming*, we must wisely proceed into a truly *disciplined examination* that isn't tempted to stray, yet again, into one of our old, already worn out, *alibies*, for all alibies are really *damned lies*. Rather, we need to do, for *ourselves* -- and for *one another* -- the *responsible* favor of honestly putting to best use, for all, all of our most *reliably rational life's lessons here in our own corner of this sadly lost world*.

As C. S. Lewis's fictional demon, Screwtape, *boasted* to his nephew, Wormwood, on Evil's temptations: "Mortals always picture *us* as putting things *in* their minds; in reality, our best work is done by keeping things *out*", *i.e., e.g.,* by *hiding* the *fuller facts* and all *unintended consequences* of temptations. We fall for Screwtape's scheme, *hellbent* on "getting *our way*" into willingly *faked and fault-filled fantasies* against our knowing better. As Lewis explained, "There is wishful thinking in hell as well as on earth." But, as true Christians foresee, it's only in Heaven that there's *never* any *wishful* thinking, for, in Heaven, we're in the very closest relationship with Christ, and there's *no dissatisfaction*.

As *good* friends try to share their cautionary concerns for our best, *we can't stand* to hear their opinions, for *we "need" all our fantasies* to "come true", and *their cautioning, echoes our doubts*. Against such warnings that *we refuse to use, we pull* Screwtape's con-job on *ourselves*. Clearer, less selfishly agenda-driven minds, can always help.

Unless we *stop* telling ourselves *how wonderful it would be to get "our own way"* in our "otherwise fantasies", we'll have to contend with all the disappointing, even disastrous, *consequences* of having distracted ourselves from all the clutter under our *desire*, with more debris to come, from stupidly self-centered temptations. Selfish "fantasies" *won't ever* be met, *they can't* be met, as they're *begotten* by our own *ill-conceived* scenarios.

Through all of fallen humanity's history, *false* promises and *erroneous* expectations have repeatedly led into needless heartbreak, depression, brutality against others and even to suicide, when fantasies of otherwise scenarios aren't rationally identified, then challenged and so, changed, to bring us, honestly, up to speed with our *fallen reality*. *We drift into daydreams* that lull us to sleep, until we're shaken awake, and maybe too late, by *nightmares*.

In the middle of the 20th-Century, in America, in the UK and in Europe, folks were beginning to "come out of their closets", as it was put, to come to grips with *unchosen, undeniably involuntary, same-sex orientation*. They were now more easily meeting up with others who also were same-sex attracted. But then, cluelessly homophobic "do-gooders", some of whom were doubtless prompted by *sincere desires to help*, misread *same-sex orientation* into a few *inapplicable* Bible verses about ancient *sexual abuse* of slaves, foreigners and defeated enemy soldiers. So, they assumed that they had their "prooftexts" to footnote "ministries" of so-called "sexual conversion therapy". Thus, "the 'ex-gay' movement" began, for changing "gays" into "straights". But, as it was ill-based, both biblically and scientifically, it was doomed to fail from the start. And *fail*, it did, but not before it did lots of damage to so many same-sex oriented folks and their families. It was a sadly traumatic example of temptations to "do good", ignorantly based in flawed understandings. It harmed many who then, wanted nothing more to do with Christianity.

Do *you* recall the utter failures of these “ex-gay” programs that even sexually abused those who were trapped into trying to be “ex-gay”? Do *you* recall these many notorious “ex-gay” fraudsters? Some of you, *yourselves*, were *victims* of this horrible hoax.

As I noted in my 1982 booklet, “*Ex-Gay*”: “Ex-gay” promoter Sharon Kuhn *admitted* to Campus Crusade’s *Worldwide Challenge*, in September 1980: “Most ministries to Christian homosexuals soon die out.” Yet Campus Crusade’s editor titled this article, “Hope for Homosexuals.” Greg Reid, the ex-gay Eagle Ministry’s founder, an Exodus Network leader, and a hostile foe of EC, finally admitted, after the Exodus Conference of 1980: “New, novice ministries were continually recruited while a vast majority of old ones dropped out due to backsliding.” So, he did *finally* admit that: “Exodus has hurt far more than it ever aided. And any ‘aid’ *never* included any ‘cure’ for homosexuality.”

“Ex-gay” leaders *may* have started by trying to become “ex-gay”, themselves, but they *knew full well* that they, themselves, hadn’t changed, e.g., Frank Worthen, Guy Charles, Colin Cook, John Paulk, *et al.* Most of the fakers *got caught in sex scandals with other guys*, including naive young males seeking the “ex-gay” *experience* but getting, instead, more *same-sex* experience by *seduction*, even *rape*, by their allegedly “ex-gay healers”.

Still, most *antigay* evangelical establishmentarians, at the very highest levels, e.g., at the evangelical flagship, *Christianity Today*, *World* magazine and *Moody Monthly*, were tempted to become *co-conspirators* in *pushing continuously false promises* and *failing to report the sex abuse and cover-ups* by the so-called “ex-gay” leaders. Even a major *Presbyterian* professor, Richard Lovelace at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, *endorsed* Colin Cook’s *Seventh-day Adventist* “ex-gay” book for “the person who wants to be free” of homosexuality. Lovelace called Cook’s book, “an authentic theological masterpiece ... a jewel ... a theological pearl ... a silver bullet against evil [and] the best book available for those whose sin is homosexual”. *What nonsense!* At this very same time, Cook *fled* his “ex-gay ministry” in Pennsylvania after *his* “ex-gay” promise was found to be a *farse*, as he was *sexually seducing* gay guys who sought his “ex-gay” *healing* and got caught up in his “ex-gay” *fix*. Cook scrambled to the West and continued his scam in Colorado, continuing his “sex-gay” sessions out there. And other “ex-gay” leaders were *replicating* Cook’s failures as well as his sex-seductions across America, seducing their own same-sex attracted counselees into so-called “therapeutic” male-on-male sexual experiences.

Now, well over a half-century after that “ex-gay” hoax was hatched, and then fell apart, and as recently as the Winter 2023 issue of SDA’s *Adventist Today*, its executive editor, Loren Seibold, calls for “some courage in the denomination to initiate an apology” for all of Cook’s false claims and bad behavior. Seibold says: “I think that even for those who can’t let go of their disapproval of homosexual relationships, an official apology should still be made for the church’s failure to prevent their own members from being sexually abused -- in fact, for giving homosexual members tacit encouragement” to change, even after Cook’s misbehavior was *known*. But, of course, there are always temptations to resist confession of wrongs, even by way of “convenient” *alibies*, such as homophobia.

Will others find some courage to initiate such apologies? Seibold honestly points out that, “Gay change therapy is a failure, even though those at the top of the denomination are still supporting gay change to this day, now with an orientation to celibacy. Not only has there been no repentance, but our church leaders are continuing to pursue the same approach.” This failure is duplicated in many other antigay evangelical venues. Temptations to *lie in the name of Jesus*, for *Jesus’ sake*, are far worse than ridiculous.

Well, it was a decade ago, June, 2013, after *four decades of woefully false promises*, that the impending closure of *the ex-gay network*, Exodus International, was announced by its board chairman, Alan Chambers. The more complete story was at last now being publicly confessed. "After a year of dialogue and prayer about the organization's place in a changing culture", it was Chambers' turn to apologize for the "ex-gay" movement's failed promises: "I am sorry for the pain and hurt many of you have experienced. I am sorry that some of you spent years working through the shame and guilt you felt when your attractions didn't change. I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and *reparative* theories about sexual orientation." But, where's the *reparations* for all those reparative failures. Sadly, too many antigay Christians still *aren't* sorry!

Ironically, Chamber's confession came out as *World* magazine, that very cluelessly *antigay* evangelical news magazine, had just then given him its annual "Daniel of the Year" Award. So, embarrassed, it clumsily hurried to hide its declaration rather than to "Dare to be a Daniel, to Dare to stand alone, to Dare to have a purpose firm, to Dare to make it known." The temptation is always to refuse to confess our *wrongs*, even when that refusal fosters still more fallacious messages, more false promises and still more misery in unfortunate consequences. Self-centered agendas, at the expense of others' misery, are not at all, what Jesus called us all to do. *World* magazine thus refused to do any *real* apologizing to all of those who were tortured through false promises that *World* had backed so relentlessly, along with so many other "evangelically" *antigay* voices.

Perhaps you recall *these homosexual tricksters*, too -- Jeffrey Dahmer, Roy Cohn, Michael Jackson, Eddie Long, Billy James Hargis, Ted Haggard, Earl Paulk, *et al.* Four of these were *preachers!* But Dahmer was the very worst of all the gay tricksters, for he seduced gay guys to come home with him, where he'd murder them, cook their remains and eat them. Even after he'd made the headlines and all knew what he'd done, I recall some of my gay clients saying, "Well, *he's cute! I'd have gone home with him!*" It's not only the *clueless* who trick *themselves* into sex with *strangers*. Well, while imprisoned, Dahmer was murdered by another inmate – but no inmate could *stomach his* remains.

Research on *sex abuse* against *male minors* by Catholic priests who're all so stupidly and unbiblically sworn to celibacy, finds, *e.g.*, the *majority* of accused priests in the US (55.7%) had one formal allegation of *sex abuse* made against them, 26.4% had two or three such allegations against them, 17.8% had four to nine allegations, 3.5% had ten or more. For the priests with only one allegation, it seems to have been enough of a wake-up call for them to *stop it*. This data is from Oxford University research in 2012.

Of course, there've been other terrible scoundrels who've yielded to temptations of *various* kinds for selfishness, *i.e.*, Charles Ponzi, Bernie Madoff, Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell, Elizabeth Holmes, Amy Bock, Sam Bankman-Fried, Lou Pearlman, Sylvia Browne, *et al.* All such tricksters wickedly appeal to what they suspect others want and tie it up with what *they, themselves*, want, *at their victims' expense*, and *even their deaths*.

Note: *each temptation to betray appeals to another's temptation for approval*, and that *fatal combination* results, finally, in what the victim *and* the victimizer *didn't want* -- if, indeed, victims and victimizers *survive* the encounters *alive*, to deal with the unwanted

aftermath and uncounted consequences to both. But tricksters seldom learn to reject their temptations to swindle others. Selfishness refuses to care for any but *one's self!*

What we *lust* for, without wiser data, *blinds* us to the bigger, clearer picture, that then *explodes* in our faces, sooner or later. We're all so susceptible to swallowing our very own selfishly rationalized self-prescriptions to yield to temptation that, as St. Augustine warned, for example: "Desire for fame tempts even noble minds." "Noble" isn't enough to crush *ignoble* selfishness. And if it's not "fame" we seek – but it often *is* "fame" -- we *fantasize whatever* we chase after into *shockingly unforeseen* circumstances and even far worse. It's all done to so foolishly, so very wickedly, so very stupidly, get "*our way*" in *projected fantasies* that truly *don't exist* as we tell ourselves they *do exist*. So, *we lose!*

Narrow-mindedly fallen, we foolishly fixate on shortsightedly *coveted "ink blots"* for our very own "enhancement", and thus, we repeatedly fail to foresee the *fuller reality in all temptations*, *i.e.*, they're all in ego's *self-centered, self-deluding deceptions*, distracting us from their *inevitable down sides* of disappointment, and even *destruction*. We're all *closed-mindedly* and *selfishly* prone to ignore what's *unintendedly linked* to temptations until our charade is exposed for what it was all along: a *selfishly stupid hoax on our own egotistical naivete*. But, we seldom, if ever, *learn* this lesson, as we tend to *refuse* to take *responsibility* for all we *don't want to admit* -- as if our *not wanting to admit the truth* is, somehow, in *our best interest*. It can camouflage what we already know from bad experiences *to be fantasies that led us into temptations and troublingly unintended*, but woefully predictable, *traps of self-torture and tragedy* that can *destroy others* also.

Critical thinking can help us, but *not* if it's *renounced* by *what's* a "convenient" *excuse* to cast critical thinking aside. When we do that, we hold ourselves hostage to what we *stupidly, self-centeredly, contrived* against all of our *experienced awareness of reality*.

So, let's all listen up! Let's all listen *Up, to God!* *He is the only True Source of Truth.* God is The Truth, Himself. *So, we mustn't leave it up to our own selfish agendas and shortsightedly self-centered rationalizations, or flimsy excuses that fell flat even as we'd already fabricated them in our self-defensively self-delusional excuses* for yielding to them. All temptations come *with reality-based clues*, God's gifts, for a *wise escape*, so *helpfully* wrapped in a *distractingly uneasy conscience* requiring immediate, seriously sincere *attention*. Halting our *entering into* temptation is "a still small voice" for our *true freedom*. (I Kings 19:12) By God's Will, we're *aware*; but, by ours', will we pay attention?

Flirting with temptation *fuels fools' fantasies with rationalizations* that resist the facts-of-life, ever since our ancestors' Fall in Eden's Garden. So, let's not keep on *fooling us* into even more of our foolish and fatally flawed fairy tales. *We can't* control what *others* think or do, but *we can* aim to walk in *God's Word*, through *His Wisdom*, by *His Love*.

As Jesus told his followers: "Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are *blessed*, for *Heaven is theirs*. You are *blessed* when others revile you and say all kinds of evil against you *falsely*, on *my* account. *Rejoice, be glad*, for *your reward is great in Heaven*. They persecuted the prophets, too, before they persecuted you." (Matt 5:10ff)

Behind every temptation there's a *self-centered distraction of desire*, an irrational habit that so readily ignores the bigger, still cloudy, context that always conceals more than is immediately revealed. It's why temptations lead, sooner or later, into *disappointment* or *depression*, even *disaster* -- so, the *sooner* this *fuller* picture is at least *expected*, if not

yet *in fuller focus*, and *accepted*, the *better-off* we'll be. But if there's a *refusal to see* and to *adjust* to what all wasn't seen to begin with, the ignorant can be *stubbornly ill-equipped to ever adjust*. If we *fail* to learn *lessons for adjustment* over ignorance and fantasies, and *refuse* to move on in *goodwill and wisdom*, we'll be *stuck, ill-prepared* for all of the counterfeiting junk we'll so stubbornly dump into the middle of disappointment. And that will be worse.

Attracted by *temptation* should prompt *useful conflicts* of conscience in an *appropriate suspicion* and *caution* over violating our conscience. In such situations, to continue on without rightly resolving the doubts would be an utter *lack of gratitude* to God for what all we've already been graciously given of God's guidance. The right path is in following God's *leading us out of temptation* and *delivering us from evil*, as Jesus taught us to *pray* in our Lord's Prayer. (Matt 6:9) Thus, we're lovingly *reinforced* in a *truer fellowship* with God and into truer *self-respect* and truer respect for *others*, in our truest gratitude to God for lovingly creating *us all* in His Image for our eternal Life with Him and with one another, for now and forever.

But in today's generation, that gift of God's revelation is sadly missed. On that most publicly-repeated prayer in all of history, *not one* contestant on a recent *Jeopardy* show was able to fill in the first word after Jesus addressed: "Our Father in Heaven, _____ be Thy name." *They all blanked out* over that missing word. It was another sad case of *biblical illiteracy* and a *missing peace* in the allegedly "best-educated" young Americans.

Paul advised Ephesian Christians *and us*: "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power; *put on the whole armor of God*, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, for our struggle is not against mere flesh and blood, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil. So, *put on the whole armor of God*, that you may be able to withstand these evil days and, having prevailed against everything, to still stand firm." (Eph 6:10ff) Paul, *himself*, said, *he* had to withstand *temptations*, confessing to other Christians: "I find that when I want to do what's good, evil is at hand." (Rom 7:21) Thus, as Paul told the Hebrews: "Stay close to Jesus." (Heb 12:1f) Jesus had already taught us to ask the Lord, in prayer: "*Keep us from yielding to temptation; deliver us from evil.*" (Matt 6:13) So, *may we*. For, *we must*.

We all sin, and God well knows, we do. There are enormous and mysterious forces of darkness working against us. They exceed our imagination and comprehension. But by asking God to *deliver us from evil*, we're acknowledging that, on our own, by ourselves, we're helpless to follow Jesus on His paths of righteousness that He calls us all to walk with Him, as His yokefellows. (Matt 11:28f) If, as Paul knew, we're not able to overcome *our sinful tendencies by ourselves*, how can we expect to stand up to all of those forces of evil and systems of oppression surrounding us? It's only by God's help, that *we can*.

Some translations of our Lord's Prayer ask, "Deliver us from the evil one", seemingly at odds with "Deliver us from evil." Which version is right? As John Calvin concluded, it's *useless* to debate this, since the meaning is the same in each rendering. He rightly noted that, our rebellion against God took place *within humanity* only after the rebellion against God had already taken place *within the angelic realms* of God's creation.

So, what's *our* focus when we pray to, "Our Father"? In what ways do we *identify* with the *needs of all, personally*, instead of with our trigger-finger pointing at all *others'* sins distracting us from our fist's thumb and folded fingers pointing back to *our* sins in our judging others? Do we pray for *others'* needs *and* for *our own*? Is our focus on *all* of us in *daily need* of God's mercy? If it's not framed for the good of us *all*, we're *postured* in self-aggrandizement, we've *not prayed* as we're called to pray. "Keep *us* from yielding to temptations; retrieve *us* from evil" (Matt 6:13) "Us" includes *us*. And that *solidarity* gives us *empathy*, for *urgency*, for *love!* We're all *in need, together*. We're all *in this, together*. When we *identify* with the needs of *others*, no matter the topic, we're *mindful of us all*, in God's Almighty, Omniscient, and eternally Loving Presence.

Unacknowledged temptations to sin and active *denial* that we've sinned, are, for the time being, "unforgiven" in the sense that, they're still free to distract us and those with whom we interact. Thus, this eats away at us and interferes in our lives with all others. The hesitation can be due to a *false* belief that we are *unforgivable*. But, that wise 20th-Century psychiatrist, Karl Menninger, perceptively observed: "If I could convince the people in mental hospitals that *their sins are forgiven*, 75 percent of them could leave the hospital that day." Sadly, such insight is now so sorely lacking, in psychiatry and in mental health professionals in general, not to mention all other social services and so-called "self-help" gurus or the commonly liberal "pastoral care" offered in most "mainline" churches. But what needs to be taken so seriously is the gracious fact that God takes forgiveness so seriously that He gave His Only Son, to be crucified on Calvary's cross, to provide *true atonement* for all of one's sins, no matter how egregious those sins are.

Temptations lurk all *around* us, and *within* us. They seek to *ravage* our souls, to turn us *away* from The Savior. That realization and resolving our guilt through God's Love in Christ is our *only exit* from our guilt and our guilty consciences. Lacking repentance and depending on our measly *self-justification, psychological denial*, and blaming all others, exacts terrible tolls on both *spiritual* health and *mental* health, for all such distractions postpone, and may even destroy, any reception of what we all so desperately need.

Each human being is created by God, in God's Image. But, each of us is now a *fallen* creation, prone to habituated self-centeredness, sinning against others and ourselves, and against God, Himself. So, this is what each of us should expect to find *in ourselves and in one another*. Yet, as the sinners we are, our self-centered tendencies posture *ourselves* as "victims" and *others* as "our victimizers". How sinfully self-centered and full of excuses for ourselves and full of blame for others, we all are! And it's all so very self-defeating. It's suicidal.

But, focusing on *our own fault-filled* temptations rather than finding faults in others, we are prepared to do something about *our faults*. We *can't* be in charge of *others'* faults. The entire history of humanity is a charade that testifies to our self-centeredness and to the biblical truth that, we're all *sin's perpetrators*, as well as *sin's prey*. So, we all must pray, as Jesus taught us all to pray, "*Lead us away from temptations; deliver us from evil.*" (Matt 6:13) Instead, we tend to rationalize ourselves away from praying, "lead us away from temptations", as we squat in the middle of our own muddy mess and concoct all sorts of excuses for our own faults instead of confessing them to God, our Savior.

At the intersection between, yielding to temptations and resisting temptations, there's a choice to be made. We must recognize that we have a choice. We must recognize that a fabricated fantasy will disappoint, and can even bring disaster, and so, refuse to yield to that temptation, or, we could yield to it and find out, the hard way, we're wrong.

After Jesus' baptism, he withdrew into the wilderness to be alone with God, for forty days and forty nights of *communion with Him*, in further preparation for all that now lay ahead on his earthly mission for our salvation through his crucifixion and resurrection. There, in that remote wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan, himself. (Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11) To be our Savior, Jesus had to be tempted as we all are tempted, and in our place, he had to resist all these temptations on our own behalf. (Hebrews 2:14ff)

There in that wilderness, Jesus was hungry after having fasted for forty days and forty nights. So, Satan tried to tempt him into changing stones into bread. Jesus dumped that temptation by citing Psalm 91:11f: "We don't live by bread alone". Satan was so bent on trapping Jesus, he tried to distract *himself* from who this was he was trying to control by temptation. As we all have misled ourselves and others, Satan, too, tried to do. Satan tried to lead Jesus away from his Father in Heaven and to get him to turn to obedience to Satan, himself. It's always Satan's strategy. But Jesus answered Satan with what Satan was too *self-centered* to expect: "We're to bow down to God alone." (Duet 6:13) Then, as he does with all of us, Satan tried again to lead Jesus astray by showing him all sorts of "goodies" and fame-generating scenarios, in exchange for Jesus' bowing down to him. But Jesus declared, "We're not to *test* the Lord. We're to *worship* and *serve* God alone!" (Duet 6:13ff) "Goodies" won't do, neither then, nor now.

Still, Satan refused to give up. He tried to seduce Jesus into sinning against God by challenging Jesus to pointlessly leap from the top of the Temple's pinnacle before Jesus had accomplished what he'd come here to do. Some may have been wowed by such an event, but *drama* is not *devoted faith*. Even after Jesus rose from the dead, many had their own vested interest in denying the Resurrection.

The response Christ gave to Satan in that wilderness experience *points* to the higher reality of *scripturally true faith in God* and in our *true relationship with Christ*. Rather than finding stupid shortcuts, earthly power and control over all, or seeking entertaining allure in mere "spectacles", Jesus calls for our *living* the Word of God, in our unrelenting *trust* and *gratitude*, in our unhindered *trust* and *allegiance* to God alone.

Christians of the postmodern age could—and really should—get a clue from these Gospels of Matthew and Luke, in both of their 4th chapters, and reconsider how we have so sinfully embraced our temptations. Ours is a wilderness, not of desert sand, but of internet, social media, partisan politics, and cultic allegiance to human leaders who know nothing of the richness of a genuine relationship with Jesus, the Christ. As a result, masses of the population are more concerned with usurping power for *their gain* and *controlling others*, protecting rights prioritized by *them*, and putting on a flashy *show* of "worship", than cultivating a truly and *biblically committed* relationship with God through the presence of Jesus Christ and the connective power of God's Holy Spirit.

Temptation to blame *others* is as old as the *first humans*. And it's always motivated by trying to duck out of *one's own* faults. But that's so flimsy and so counter-productive, as both blamer and blamed say the *others* are at fault. But, if *honestly aware* of oneself, none can really buy that old lie of "innocence". The rivalries exist in familial and social

conflicts, in politics and in other social scenes with all sorts of agendas. Even Christians forget the biblical calling to turn from this world's agendas and carry Jesus' message to all in as clearly unencumbered a way as we can with God's help, then leave it to God.

When we're tempted to do what's *not right*, what's really *wrong*, when we're tempted to leave undone, what's right, we should recall Jesus' own reasoned rebukes to Satan. If such rebuking was what Jesus needed to do and what Satan needed to hear, it's surely what's needed by folks like us, who can so easily be tripped up by Satan and tripped up by others and tripped up *in* ourselves. But, as we wend our way through this still fallen world, as we're now called to do, as the *everyday* yokefellows of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, we're reminded that, the blessed goal of this trip here, is to live in our Loving Heavenly Father's Home, with Jesus and with His redeemed family from all generations, forever freed from *all temptations*, for, there, there'll never be anything at all for us to *covet*, to *lure* us away from our Heavenly Father's Home. Temptation's era will be over and done with, forever. Amen.