

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 14- God's Relationship with Evil

Church May 29, 2022

Matthew 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,

6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"

7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;

9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Now many of you may not have been aware- but back in 2019- the

man, who occupies the *highest* Position within the “*Roman religious system*”¹, “Pope Frances”- *formally and officially* changed part of the wording of what we call the “*Lord’s Prayer*.”² Now since the Lord’s Prayer is found in Scripture (**Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4**), we need to know that this man; this human being; this fallen, sinful person; this creature of the dust- who was born with a fallen Nature and who has, no doubt, sinned repeatedly during his lifetime- took it upon himself to actually *edit* the Holy Bible; and change the inspired; inerrant; and infallible Word of the living God!

And as incredible as that *should* seem to you- Jorge Mario Bergoglio³ did this *boldly and publicly* and without any hesitation! How could he do that? Because the Pope being *superior* to Scripture is *absolutely* within the parameters of what this “*apostate religious system*” believes and teaches about the Man-made “Office” of the Pope and the sacred Scriptures.

About 505 years ago, God the Holy Spirit raised up several men to challenge the Man-made Teachings and Practices of the visible Church. And what came out of that series of Challenges is the “*Protestant Reformation*”. And although there are many, many Issues that were challenged back then- two rose to be at the forefront of this great Awakening:

1. Who (or What) has “Final Authority” to “bind the Conscience” of the believer and determine “Right” from “Wrong”?
2. How are lost people forgiven and made Righteous?

The Issue of who has “*Final Authority*” or “*Supreme Authority*” became known as the “*Formal Cause*” of the Reformation; while the Issue of how lost people obtain Righteousness became known as the “*Material Cause*” of the Reformation.

Those aligned with Rome said that the Pope- in his capacity as the “*Vicar of Christ*”⁴ had “*Final Authority*”; and they also said that what Lost people needed to become Righteous was Grace and Faith- along with ongoing participation in *all* of the Sacraments over ones entire Lifetime. So, to Rome- each individual has to perfect his own intrinsic righteousness.

The Reformers however said, “The Scriptures and the Scriptures ALONE” had “*Final Authority*” to “*bind the Conscience*” and that Lost people are made

¹ In 1563, the Leadership of the Vatican, formally and officially pronounced an “*Anathema*” (an eternal Damnation) on anyone, “*who believes or teaches that Justification (being forgiven and made Righteous) is by Faith alone*”- which is the “Biblical Gospel”. And so, from that moment until this day- this Organization has isolated themselves from the Authority of Scripture and is an “apostate religious ‘system’” and NOT a “Church” and should repent.

² This is a Prayer that Jesus told us to pray. He did NOT tell us to memorize these verses and then repeat them. He told us to “pray after” the Issues He raises in this Prayer. So, this is actually the ‘*Believer’s Prayer*’- because Jesus told Believers to pray this way. The ‘*Lord’s Prayer*’- the Prayer that Jesus actually prayed- is over in **John 17**.

³ Pope Frances’ real name

⁴ Rome teaches that as “Vicar”, the Pope is the “physical embodiment” of Jesus Christ Himself.

Righteous- “*by Faith and by Faith ALONE*”- as God imputes the spotless Righteousness of Jesus to us. And, of course, these two Statements were summarized by the Latin phrases:

1. *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture Alone)
2. *Sola Fide* (by Faith Alone)

Rome believes and teaches the Man-made Doctrine that says that the Church “produced” the Bible- which means that the Church is *superior* to the Scriptures. And as earthly Head of the Church- the Pope can therefore change the Scriptures to fit in with how God is supposedly leading him.

The Protestants reject that and believe and teach that the Scriptures “produced” the Church; and therefore, the Scriptures are forever fixed.

So, with that background in mind- what was the issue that was so troubling that the Pope decided to alter the Scriptures? The Pope’s Decision was to change the Prayer that Jesus told us to ask God about from...

“Lead us not into Temptation”

... to asking God,

“Do not let us fall into Temptation”

... and the Rationale that the Pope gave for this Change is as follows:

“I am the one who falls; it’s not God pushing me into Temptation to then see how I have fallen. A Father doesn’t do that. A Father helps you to get up immediately. It’s Satan who leads us into Temptation. That’s his Department.”⁵

Now as Bad and as Wrong as the Pope is about altering what the Bible says, there are actually *two* Sins that have been committed here:

1. The false, Man-made Teaching that says the Pope can change the Holy Bible, when the wording doesn’t suit him.
2. The fact that many Protestants agreed with the Change

Other very godly people have weighed in with this Change- as they see this as both an *exegetical* as well as a *theological* Problem. But we need to remember that

⁵ The third edition of the *Messale Romano*, the liturgical book that contains the guiding texts for mass in the Roman Catholic church.

this Issue is NOT new. I have been asking this Question to Believers all over this Gulf Coast for at least 10 years:

“In what is commonly called, ‘the Lord’s Prayer’- we are praying to God. So, why do we ask God to NOT lead us into Temptation? Does God lead us into Temptation unless we ask Him not to?”

What is important for us to know (aside from the obvious abuse of the Pope’s so-called “Authority”) is that the Pope’s Rationale about this Issue reveals a very Bad and Wrong understanding of Scripture that actually *undermines* its Divine Authority. The Pope’s understanding of the Word of God- the Holy Bible- is to turn things upside down.

Right side up, we should say, *“The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that God does “such and such”. And on the surface, that doesn’t seem to be Good or Right. But, since the infallible Word of the living God says that God absolutely DOES do that- our job is NOT to change the Bible- but to struggle to discover the Wisdom and Goodness of why God would act that way.”*

But standing on our heads- as the Pope did- we would say, *“We already know what is Wise and Good before we ever read the Bible. So, if a particular Verse or Passage seems to tell us that God acts in a way that is contrary to what we already believe- we may then conclude that the biblical Text simply cannot mean that, or the Bible is Wrong and needs to be changed.”*

And then the Leaders of the visible Church go through “spiritual gymnastics” and twist themselves into a “theological knot”- in order to agree with one of two Statements:

1. The biblical text is simply Mistaken and/or False and should be changed
2. The biblical text is True- BUT we must change the MEANING of the text and ignore what it actually says- so that the text falls into line with what we already believe to be true.

... but whether they side with #1 or #2- the Result is the same:

Authority has shifted from Heaven to Earth.

And the Irony of this is that, in this case- the Christian Church, which has the Duty to make sure that God’s people understand what God has said- is the very Entity that seeks to either *ignore; minimize; or outright change* what God has said- so that the earthly sensibilities of people, *who may not even be saved-* are not offended.

So, when the Pope said, “*A Father doesn’t lead His Children into Temptation. A Father helps you to get up immediately. It’s Satan who leads us into Temptation. That’s his Department*”... he meant, a “good and loving” Father wouldn’t lead his children into Temptation. And since everyone already knows that God IS good and loving- the Reasoning of the Pope was- the Scriptures are obviously wrong and need to be changed.

So, we can see that the Issue here is over “*God’s Relationship with Evil.*” And that Issue is clearly seen in the “*Lord’s Prayer*”- but it also is seen right here with Jesus and satan in the Wilderness.

Matthew *infallibly* wrote under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit in verse 1 and said,

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

.. and Dr. Luke wrote this in **Luke 4:1&2a:**

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil...

... while John Mark wrote this in **Mark 1:12**

Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.

... where the word that was translated here into English as “**impelled**” comes from a Greek word (*ekballoo*; Strong’s #1544), that means: *to lead one forth or away somewhere with a force which he cannot resist.*

So, Jesus was “**led up**” (**Matthew 4:1**); “**led around**” (**Luke 4:1**); and “**impelled**” (**Mark 1:12**) by God the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. And the way we are to understand this- is that God the Holy Spirit led Jesus forth or led Him away with such a Force that Jesus simply could NOT resist it.

Another way of saying this is to say that God the Father was LEADING Jesus the Son into Temptation.

Now as we ponder this Issue- we need to begin with three immutable (unchanging) Truths:

1. Evil exists in the earth to a great extent. Horrific and unspeakable Acts go on all the time.

2. God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time. So, God works in such a way that His Will ALWAYS is done.
3. God uses Evil- to bring forth a “Good” thing- that would NOT have been brought forth had God not used the Evil

... and the Bible clearly declares that all three Statements are true.

But the Logic and the Action that flowed out from the mind and pen of Mr. Bergoglio was “upside down.” What we *should* say is that not only is God a “good and loving Father”- but He is a *perfect* Father; a *holy* Father; and a *righteous* Father. And then we should say that God is *better* than ANY earthly Father. And therefore, what God says and does- is *better* than what ANY earthly Father can or would say or do.

But then we should *also* say that since God is God and not a mere Human- His perfect Being (Who God is); and His perfect Commands; and His perfect Actions should NEVER be *forced* into the mold of our own fallen, fallible understanding of how “good Fathers” are supposed to think; and how they are supposed to act. Having *perfect* Wisdom; and knowing all things- our heavenly Father does things no human Father could or would do. And the ONLY way we can make sense of this- is by allowing the Scriptures to teach us what to think and say about this.

And THAT is what the Puritans called, the “*Logic of Scripture*”. It is looking at all of Life as we “*stand in God’s shoes*”; or as we view all of this Life with “*God’s eyes*”. And again, that is accomplished ONLY by measuring all things in accord with Scripture. And this is what “*being Biblical*” is all about. And it is what “*Doing what Jesus would do (WWJD)*” is all about. It is reading and studying the Bible until the “*Perspective of God*” becomes clear to us- *especially* when dealing with Hard Topics like “Evil”.

So, what we NEED to understand is that there is NO earthly Father- NOT a single one- that even comes close to having the Love and Mercy and Kindness and Grace and Beauty and Wisdom and Goodness that God has- in PERFECTION! And that is true because every earthly Father on the face of the earth that we would call, kind and loving and good- is a sinner in need of Grace. And as a sinner- he is blind to one or more areas of his own Life that operates in disobedience to God. And so, all of a Man’s Thoughts and Actions MUST be governed by the infallible Word of the living God- or they are Wrong!

So, we read the Bible and we see beautiful and lovely and sweet and precious and loving Words that melt our hearts and that humble us; and that put us in Awe. And we also read the Bible and *many* times- not once or twice- but *many* times; and we see God *departing* from the “*Logic of Man*” as He speaks and acts in

ways that leave us bewildered. And it is at this point that we make a choice as to just how we are to comprehend this.

So, please go with me this morning as I lead us through the Holy Bible to find suitable Examples that will illustrate God's relationship with Evil and look at this Issue from "God's Perspective rather than from Man's.

Example #1: No human Father, who is good and loving, would ever take the Life of his own child in place of the Life of others. We would *condemn* a Father who would do that. Yet that is *exactly* what God did to His one and only divine Son, Who God loved MORE than anyone else- and the One Who pleased Him- perfectly! And so, we read verses like **Isaiah 53:10** that says,

But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief...

... and we are bewildered.

Because this verse does NOT merely say that Jesus was crushed. He *was* crushed- yes- but this verse doesn't say that. This verse also DOESN'T say that God simply *allowed* Jesus to be crushed. No, this verse says that the Lord was PLEASED to crush Jesus! And the word that was translated here as "**pleased**" comes from a Hebrew word that is the root word for other words like "Delight" and "Joy" and "Happiness" as well as "Pleasure".

So, it DELIGHTED God the Father to crush God the Son! It brought God the Father great JOY to crush the Treasure of Heaven! It was pleasurable to the Owner and Creator of the Universe for Him to crush the One He loved the MOST! God was happy to crush Jesus! And if you don't think God was sadistic- then you must admit that this just doesn't sound right.

But then this verse goes on to say that He- God the Father- PUT JESUS TO GRIEF! God brought Jesus into Grief! God *wanted* Jesus to grieve! And, again, our natural understanding leaves us bewildered.

But when we turn to Scripture, we see that God desired to manifest the "Glory" of His Grace (**Ephesians 1:6a**). And God wanted that Glory to be seen and marveled at. And the way that God did that- was to crush His sinless Son and put Him to Grief- so that unworthy rebels, whom God predestined to be saved- *could* be saved. And when sinners are saved by what God alone does for them- then the Glory of God's Grace is seen and magnified!

So, God used Evil (the Death of His Son at the hands of wicked men)- to bring forth a "Good" thing (the Glory of His Grace in saving unworthy sinners) - that would NOT have been brought forth- had God not used Evil.

Example #2: No earthly Father, who we would call, “Good” would ever take the Life of his *own* child in order to spare that very child a *worse* Fate, namely, Hell. Yet that is *exactly* what God did with the Church at Corinth in the 1st Century. Please read with me **1Corinthians 11:29-33:**

29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

In the highly dysfunctional Church at Corinth during the 1st Century- the Apostle Paul was instructing them in just how to become a godly Church. And here in Chapter 11- he is dealing with the correct way in which to understand and conduct the Lord’s Table. And in verse 29, Paul says,

For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

... and in the very next verse he said,

For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep

So, Paul says here that because people in this Church had NOT “judged the body rightly” (correctly)- that there were many of the members of this Church, who had become physically weak and sick and that some of them had actually died!

Now this sounds terrible! God killed people because they didn’t “judge the body rightly”? Isn’t that Evil? And how could this ever be justified. But before you think ill of God, dear friends, please look at verses 31&32 again:

31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

So, this tells us that if we would judge ourselves- we would NOT be judged by God. But then it says, “even if we are judged by God- this is NOT the worst

that can happen to us!” The absolute WORST thing that can happen to us- is falling into the same eternal Condemnation with which God is going to damn the unsaved world.

So, even when we fail to judge ourselves and God judges us- because we are saved- that Judgment is ALWAYS beneficial to us. The kind of Judgment that God gives His children is ALWAYS redeeming Judgment. It is Divine Correction- NOT Condemnation!

So, because God gave us Jesus- saved people are forever removed from God’s white-hot Anger against Sin. And the ONLY type of “Judgment” that a truly born- again person receives from God- is NEVER out of God’s Wrath but it comes from His Benevolence.

So, God used the “Evil” of physical Death- to stop the sinning of His Child by ending his Life and brining him immediately into Heaven.

Example #3: No human Father would ever endanger the Life of his child’s children; or kill them- in order to prove the Faithfulness of his child- yet that is *exactly* what God did to Job’s children in **Job 1:18-22**

18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Job was God’s child. He loved the Lord and was saved. And yet God used the “Evil” of satan to cause a great wind to kill his seven sons and three daughters. Why would a good and loving God do this? God uses Evil here to test or prove Job’s Faithfulness.

Example #4: No human Father would send a famine on his children’s land; or allow one of his children into Slavery to be the Means of saving his brothers out from that very famine. But God did both of these things.

Psalms 105:16-19a

16 And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread.

17 He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

18 They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons;

19 Until the time that his word came to pass ...

... and why did God do this?

Psalm 105:19b

... The word of the Lord tested him.

As I told you last time- the very SAME Event- is looked at, in the Bible, from two different Perspectives. And so, the very EVENT that satan means as a Temptation- is meant by God as a “Test”. And what satan uses as a means to destroy the individual- God uses as a means to prove the individual’s Faithfulness. So, while God is testing us- satan is tempting us- through the SAME Event!

And this is true whether we are talking about Jesus in the Wilderness with satan or we are talking about you and me in our Time of Temptation and Testing.

So, what was the End result for Joseph and his brothers. In **Genesis 50:20**- Moses infallibly quotes Joseph saying,

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Now when I was first saved, in the early 1970’s- I was taught that this verse says,

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God turned it for good

... and what was implied here was the way that satan and God interact with me in my Time of Temptation and Testing.

So, satan comes to me FIRST. And he buffets me; or makes me sick; or steals my finances; or kills my child; or tempts me to sin against God. And at that point- it is up to me to “rise up in my holy Faith” and “bind the devil”; or “cast him forth” from me; or I must “speak the creative Word of Victory” against Him; and then I must “believe to see the Goodness of the Lord in the land of the Living.”

And then and ONLY then does God ride in like the 7th Calvary; and He beats satan up; and throws him down; and rescues me; or heals me; or restores to me what satan stole.

But if I don't "exercise enough Faith"- I'm on my own. But even if I do exercise enough Faith- God will still NOT come to me if I have "unrepented Sin in my life; or if I have "generational Curses" that haven't been dealt with; or if I harbor unforgiveness against another brother; or if ... who knows what- because there is ALWAYS something that makes this not to work out for me.

And this entire dynamic comes forth because God ONLY "turns" the Evil that satan brings to me- into "Good" AFTER satan brings it. So, in this scenario- satan ALWAYS moves first and God merely responds to what satan has done- combined with how I have already handled it.

But that is NOT what **Genesis 50:20** says. This verse says that two things are going on SILMUTANEOUSLY!

- You meant Evil against me
- God meant it for Good

... AT THE SAME TIME!

So, God NEVER *responds* to satan. God *uses* satan as a Tool to accomplish His Will in the earth. And God *uses* the inherent Evil that already exists inside Lost people as a Tool to accomplish His Will, too. So, satan is NOT Sovereign; Humans are NOT Sovereign; Evil is NOT Sovereign- God is Sovereign!

But the Event that satan is allowed to use to attempt to destroy God's people is the very SAME Event that God uses- AT THE VERY SAME TIME- to "test" or "prove" the Faithfulness of His people.

Example #5: A good earthly Father would never lead his own Child into Temptation- so that He has the opportunity to utterly fail. And yet God did that *exact* thing here with Jesus. **Matthew 4:1** says,

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

My point here is that not only is it true that God absolutely DOES "*lead us into Temptation.*" But from His Perspective- that Temptation is a Test and an opportunity to prove our Faithfulness- NOT a way to sin against God.

But the second point I am making this morning is that when we are faced with tough and deep and profound Issues- we should get our Answers from *Scripture*, and NOT from our own human notion of what a good Father would or would NOT do.

And that is because our notions are finite. And they are ALWAYS distorted by Sin, Culture, Prejudices and our own background. So, we must continually refine what we think- by what the Bible actually teaches.

The Bible absolutely teaches that we should pray,

“Our Father . . . lead us not into temptation.”

... and it really does mean “*lead into*” or “*bring into*” (see also **Luke 5:18; 12:11; The Acts 17:20; 1Timothy 6:7; and Hebrews 13:11**).

... and that means we should pray:

“Father, since “**a man’s steps are from the Lord**” (**Proverbs 20:24**), forbid, we pray, that any Temptation we encounter by Your leading would trap us and suck us in with no way of escape. For You are faithful, and You have promised that with every Temptation “**You will provide the way of escape, that we may be able to endure it**” (**1Corinthians 10:13**).

Do for us, dear Father, what You did for Jesus, when You “*led (!)* Him by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (**Matthew 4:1**). You filled Him with the Word of God and, though He was *led* to the crisis of Temptation by Your Spirit, He did not get sucked into Sin, but triumphed by Your Word (**Matthew 4:4, 7, & 10**). For this same Grace, in all Your Leadings, we earnestly pray. Amen.”

In **Matthew 6:13**, Jesus said that we were to pray:

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

And if that was all that the Bible said- then that would be enough. But several years later, God the Holy Spirit “moved” on the first Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem- the half- brother of Jesus, and he wrote this in **James 1:13**:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

That’s true. But then Levi, the sinful tax collector turned Apostle wrote this in **Matthew 4:1**:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

So, when we put all this together- we see that God does not do the tempting- God NEVER puts evil Desires in our hearts (because He can have no evil Desires in His Heart). Yet God DOES bring us into the presence of many Tests and Trials and Provings. So, God sovereignly *allows* us to be tried and tested- so, we may be found Faithful- while satan is trying to kill, steal, and destroy. And this is why the wisest man in all the world said,

Proverbs 20:24a

Man's steps are ordained by the Lord...

The Truth is that every step we take is a step into the presence of Temptation (on satan's part) and Testing (from God's Perspective). There is not a single moment of your Life that is not a moment of Temptation- a moment when Unbelief and Acts of Disobedience are very possible.

But the "Lord's Prayer" does NOT teach us to pray *against* that kind of sovereign Guidance. What it teaches us to pray is that the Temptation does not take us *in*. Don't lead me *into* Temptation. Deliver me from this Evil that is set before me.

This day, I will stand before innumerable Temptations. That's what this Life is: endless Choices between Belief and Unbelief; between Obedience and Disobedience. And from satan's perspective- I should fall into great Sin. But from God's Perspective- I have an opportunity in each of those Tests- to prove my Faithfulness to God and to His Word. And so, I am taught to pray, "*O mighty God, forbid that I would yield. Hold me back from stepping inside the Temptation!*"

At the most crucial moment of His entire Life, Jesus told His Disciples:

Luke 22:46b

... pray that you may not enter into temptation.

So, here, just mere seconds before He was arrested and taken to be crucified, Jesus directed His followers to pray- NOT merely against the Evil that was upon them- but against *Temptation itself*.

So, on the front-end of the greatest Temptation of His Life, Jesus charged His disciples- not once but twice (**Luke 22:40, 46**)- to pray *against* Temptation itself! Forty long days of fasting in the wilderness must now feel like child's play compared to the Test that Jesus is about to endure. His Hour has come.

And as Jesus walks toward Calvary- He faces the single greatest Temptation/Test in the history of the world:

Will the sinless God-Man remain Faithful to God's Will as He suffers Torture and Death- so that all of the rebels on whom God chose to "set His Love" will be saved- so that the Glory of God's Grace will be praised?

OR

Will Jesus act independently as fully God and come off that Cross and refuse to be separated from God the Father because of the Sins of unworthy people that have been imputed to Him?

... and yet, as His Own great Time of Temptation/Testing begins, bringing such Agony that sweat falls from His Head like drops of blood (**Luke 22:44**), Jesus turns to His followers twice to say,

Pray that you may not enter into Temptation" (Luke 22:40&46).

And that tells us that praying against Temptation is no fleeting aside, as if any words from God Himself may be overlooked. Here in the Garden, and in the very moment Jesus taught us to pray, He says to pray not only against Sin (that's implied), but explicitly to *pray against Temptation*.

And for those of us who strive to heed His Words, we find at least three implications of Jesus's (perhaps surprising) Command:

1. God really does keep us from *some* Temptations in response to our Prayers. God and His Son do not charge us to play at Prayer. And that means that Prayer matters. The sovereign God chooses to rule the Universe in such a way that Prayer plays a vital role. Under His Hand, some Events transpire (or not) because God's people prayed; while others do not transpire (or do) because they did not.

When we pray not only against our own Sin, but against the Temptation to sin, we display a "*Mature Humility*". We acknowledge our Weakness and the Power of Sin. And we remember our Father's Heart for Holiness and for our Good. God "**himself does not tempt anyone**" (**James 1:13**). We know that the Blame for Sin- the Accountability- falls squarely on each person. "**Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust**" (**James 1:14**). And yet God, in His Grace and Mercy, delights to keep us from *many* Temptations- countless times perhaps even when we fail to ask, and many precious instances in direct response to our asking.

If we take seriously the depths of Sin in us, and the depths of Mercy in our Father, we will heed the Words of Jesus, and the commentary of John Owen:

"Let no man pretend to fear sin that does not fear temptation also!

These two are too closely united to be separated. He does not truly hate the fruit who delights in the root.”⁶

So, for the sake of Truth and a good Conscience, we distinguish Temptation from Sin. But for the sake of Holiness and Joy, we do NOT separate them. And so, we pray not only against our own Sins, but against our Temptations.

2. When we pray against Temptation, we begin the process of seeking to avoid it. And, in doing so, we become a “means” to God answering our Prayer. God not only often keeps us from Temptation because of our Prayers, but in the very Act of praying itself- we engage more deeply in the Fight. In Prayer- we fortify our souls against Sin. We become more deeply invested. As we pray- we are resolving, by the Spirit, to hold to the Truth and not “**be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**” (**Hebrews 3:13**). We remind our hearts that the Pleasures of Sin are shallow and fleeting (**Hebrews 11:25**), while Pleasure in God is deep and enduring (**Psalms 16:11**).

Praying against Temptation leads us, then, to actually plan against Temptation in tangible ways. Knowing our Patterns and proclivities to particular Sins, we avoid unwise contexts. We “flee youthful passions” (**2 Timothy 2:22**) and “**make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires**” (**Romans 13:14**). We heed the Wisdom of a loving father to his son (**Proverbs 5:1**) about the “forbidden woman” (**Proverbs 5:3**): not just to stay out of her bed; but to “**keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house**” (**Proverbs 5:8**).

It is Grace not only to be kept from Sin but also from Temptation (**The Revelation 3:10**). Our spirit indeed may be willing to say, “*No!*” to Sin, but the Flesh is most often- very weak (**Matthew 26:41**). So, praying against Temptation sets us on the Path of Planning to live against it as well.

Finally, when we *do* enter into Temptation, if we have prayed against it, then we should be least taken off guard by it, and most ready for battle. God loves a heart that prays against Temptation, and he often answers our plea. And yet God’s Ways are higher than ours. He knows, in love, when to *allow* Temptation/Testing to come. In fact, Jesus says, “**It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come**” (**Luke 17:1**). So, pray as we may against them- God has not promised to *always* answer that Prayer the way we want. Not yet.

So, as we pray against Temptation, we prepare ourselves to not be surprised when they *do* come (**1 Peter 4:12**). And when we’ve prayed *against* Temptation, we can feel all the more clearheaded that God has lovingly allowed this Test into

⁶ John Owen; *Temptation Resisted and Repulsed*; Banner; pg. 44

our life. But even then- He has not left me without His Promises for those very moments.

1Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

So, like Joseph, it may mean running (**Genesis 39:11&12**). Like Jesus, it often will mean rehearsing the very Words of God (**Matthew 4:1-11**) or staying silent before fools (**Matthew 26:63; Mark 14:61; The Acts 8:32**).

“The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation” (2Peter 2:9), not just guard them from Trials. And the Christian most prepared to conquer Temptation is the one who prays and plans against it. So, pray against your *specific* “besetting Sins”, and as you do, go a step further and pray against *specific* Temptations as well.

And when we pray against Temptation, we can expect two outcomes:

1. In real and tangible ways, God will be pleased to keep us from Temptations we otherwise would have encountered had we not prayed.
2. At times God may see fit to have us encounter the very Temptation we have prayed (and planned!) against — and when we do, having prayed, we will be better prepared to face them and defeat them in the Power of His Spirit.

God will provide a way out of Temptation (**1Corinthians 10:13**). And that means we should look for that way out- and then take it! And then we must thank God- not only for the many times, unbeknownst to us that He guarded us from Temptation altogether, but also for the times He answered our Prayers *differently*- not simply by keeping us FROM Temptations- but by keeping us THROUGH them!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.