

# SATANIC TEMPTATIONS

by John Angell James

I would now invite your attention to a subject of deep importance, yet of great and awful mysteriousness; I mean, *the agency of Satan in our temptations to sin*. Of the real personality of this dreadful being, there can exist no well-founded doubt to anyone who, with meekness and a teachable spirit, submits his understanding to the teaching of God's word. To resolve what is there affirmed of Satan's varied attributes and actions into mere orientalisms, and to conceive that nothing more is intended than a bold personification of the evil principle, goes far to turn the whole gospel history into fable, and requires but another and more adventurous step in the interpretation of Scripture, to convert even the Savior himself into a mystical character, and to make him only the personification of virtue. Of the history of Satan we know but little, except that he is an apostate spirit, a fallen angel, pre-existent to man, cast out of heaven for his sin, and now in some unknown manner employing himself in seducing others to sin. He is, in all probability, the leader and chief of all the "angels who sinned and kept not their first estate—but left their own habitation, and are cast down to hell, and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment," 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6.

He is by way of eminence called "the devil," a word that signifies a slanderer and accuser, a term that perhaps has reference to his past history in heaven, and his present conduct upon earth. By way of emphasis he is called "the wicked one," Matt. 13:19, 38; Ephes. 6:16; 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18; a fearful title, importing that his whole character is made up of unmingled turpitude, and every kind of wickedness; that he is wicked in himself, and the leader of all wickedness in others. In other places he is designated "the tempter," Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5. This appellation he has derived not only from his seducing our first parents from their innocence—but probably from his successful wiles in heaven, and certainly from his constant occupation among the children of men. It may be imagined that, filled and fired

with impotent rage and revenge towards God, for his expulsion from heaven; with envy and malignity towards man, as selected in Divine sovereignty to be the object of Divine benevolence; and perhaps, above all, cherishing an envenomed personal enmity and hostility against the Lord Jesus Christ in his mediatorial character and redeeming work, he is ever seeking by his temptations to keep men under that yoke to which he has reduced them, and from which it is the design of the Savior to emancipate them.

It would seem to have been his object to be the tyrannical head of the human race, to have all mankind as his vassals, and to lead them by sinning against God, to do his will. Perhaps his design was to be an object of worship and adoration, "the god of this world," 2 Cor. 4:4; hence his declaration to Christ, "All these kingdoms will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me," Matt. 4:9. His grand ambition and policy then, are to be a kind of rival with God, to lead men off from Jehovah, and draw them under his own influence. This accounts for his personal enmity to Christ, who "was manifested to destroy the works of the devil," 1 John 3:8. To counteract the work of redeeming mercy, as far as in him lies, and thus oppose the purpose of God, the honor of Christ, and the happiness of man—he is ever tempting the children of Adam to sin, and following up, as far as permitted, his first success in the garden of Eden.

In what *manner* Satan tempts men to sin is a deep mystery. That in some way he has access to the human mind is clear, else how could he tempt at all, since he does not appear personally and solicit to iniquity? Peter in addressing Ananias said to him, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Acts 5:3. Still the mode of his operation is concealed from us. We are very imperfectly acquainted with the nature of our own spirits; and how another spirit can act upon us, is a mystery not to be explained.

The manner in which Satan and his influence are described in the word of God, and the earnestness with which we are admonished to guard against him, should excite deep concern and holy vigilance. It would seem that his **power**, though of course limited and restrained, is very great; that

his **trickery** is equal to his power; and that his **malignity** is not inferior to either. The very idea that we have to combat with such a foe, a foe that had the courage to attack the Son of God—a foe the more dangerous for the cloud of mystery that hangs about him, and conceals his movements from observation—a foe that actually subdued our first parents, notwithstanding their perfect innocence and paradisaic situation—a foe whom success has made bold, and experience sagacious, in ruining souls—a foe that may be near us at any moment, unseen, and therefore unnoticed, and may be preparing some new kind of attack, is indeed sufficient to alarm us, far more than it does, and to put us upon the best means of averting the danger. With too many professing Christians, there seems to be a careless confidence, and an air of unwarranted security, which their situation of extreme peril does not justify, and which is quite opposed to the solemn warnings contained in the word of God.

How calculated is such language as the following to stir up a deep and watchful solicitude against Satan, "Simon, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat," Luke 22:31. "We are not ignorant of Satan's devices," 2 Cor. 2:11. "I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Satan is transformed into an angel of light," 2 Cor. 11:3, 14. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith," 1 Pet. 5:8, 9. What a description! Your *adversary*; one who for power is a "*lion*," for cruelty and rage, a "*roaring lion*," for activity, "*walking about*," for diligence, "*seeking*" out his prey; for destruction and consuming purposes, "seeking whom he may *devour*."

But still more impressive and appalling is the language of Paul, in another place, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood—but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Above all taking the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench the fiery darts

of the wicked one." Ephes. 6:10-12, 16. This gives us a view of the subject of Satanic opposition, which is almost dreadful.

You cannot fail to observe that in this passage, as well as in others, the temptations of Satan are characterized by peculiar trickery and cunning. The apostle speaks of "*wiles*," in another place of "*devices*," and in another of "*subtlety*." We are led therefore to suppose that he possesses most accurate knowledge of our constitution; situation; besetting sins; weaknesses; occupations; companions; conduct; unwatchfulness—and then adapts most skillfully his temptations to the case, taking advantage of whatever can by possibility give power to his seductions.

It is not, perhaps, presumptuous to inquire, to what kinds of sins his temptations are more usually applied. Probably he has some concern in *all* solicitations to sin—but especially in those which render our character more like his own; to the vices which he himself is guilty of. To **falsehood** and **error**, for instance. He is called "a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies," John 8:44; a "deceiver," Rev. 12:9; 13:14; from this he takes his name "devil," or slanderer, and false accuser. It was in the case of a lie that he filled the heart of Ananias. The whole system of error; idolatry, in all its forms; Mohammedanism; infidelity; and heresy in its numerous grades from the highest to the lowest, must be traced up to his subtle allurements.

**Pride** is especially his sin—hence the direction given by the apostle to Timothy concerning the appointment of elders, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he will fall into the condemnation of the devil," that is, the sin for which the devil was condemned.

**Ambition**, with its attendant, jealousy, cruel as the grave, is his vice and his temptation.

All the irascible passions are especially diabolical sins, **envy**, **malice**, **wrath**, **revenge**. These form his very character, and to these he is ever exciting the susceptible children of men. Hence the expression of the apostle, "Be angry, and

sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Neither give place to the devil," that is, do not yield yourself up to him, and allow him to gain the ascendancy over you, by indulging in immoderate anger.

***Discontent, murmuring, and resistance of God's will***, in his dispensations towards us, form a state of mind to which Satan is anxious to reduce us; hence the language of the apostle, in his epistle to the Ephesians, "Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience." Ephes. 2:2.

There is one passage, already quoted, which deserves especial attention, I mean the expression, "Whereby you shall be able to quench *the fiery darts* of the wicked one." It is supposed the allusion here is to the poisoned arrows which were then, and still are, used, among barbaric tribes, the wound of which causes a sense of burning in the flesh; and that the apostle intends by this figure, to describe those horrid suggestions which sometimes arise in the minds of even godly people, and which, as they proceed from no external apparent cause, are to be traced to the malignant operation of our great adversary. Such suggestions certainly do occasionally arise, to the sore distress of the subject of them—strange, unaccountable, horrid thoughts, savoring almost of blasphemy, or at any rate of infidelity and atheism in reference to God and his word; of gloomy despair and misery as regards our own state; and of mischief and injury towards our fellow-creatures.

Perhaps all Christians are aware of the reality of such painful imaginings, which are indeed like fiery darts shot into the mind, by some cruel hand; and on account of which they go sorrowing, as if they were the evidences of a wicked and unrenewed heart. Let them not, however, on this ground doubt their conversion, or conclude unfavorably against themselves. **We are not criminal for those evil thoughts which come into the mind—but only for those which we keep and encourage there!** If we invite them, do anything that leads to them, or welcome and entertain them, there is in this case an act of the will in reference to them, and they enter into the matter of our accountability.

But thoughts which come unbidden and unwelcome, the presence of which occasions alarm and distress—like a thief, the discovery of a serpent, or a fire in the house—and which like these are expelled or extinguished in all haste, may be matter of affliction with us—but certainly will not be matter of condemnation with Him who "knows our frame, and remembers we are but dust."

I question, however, if, in this expression, the apostle does allude to these furious suggestions exclusively, and am of opinion, that he intends the whole range of Satanic temptations.

I now go on to point out **in what manner we are to carry on our conflict with Satan**. And here I would remark that we are not to call in the aid of our imagination, and attempt in any way to embody before it any personification of the evil one; so neither are we to think of any direct and immediate personal conflict with Satan himself, as if we could come to engage in battle with him, and to resist him in any other way, than by opposing all our own evil thoughts, feelings, and propensities. People of an enthusiastic and visionary turn of mind, have gone so far from sobriety of judgment, as to imagine that in their spiritual conflicts, they have been in such immediate, conscious struggles with the tempter, as almost to persuade themselves they have seen him. But this is only the effect of a heated, and misguided imagination. We can in no other way oppose Satan, than by opposing our own evil inclinations, or the enticements of people and things around us—for there is no other way in which he attacks us; or in which we can be sensible of his attacks. We can in no manner distinguish his influence from the workings of our own corruptions, so as to be able to say for sure—what is definitely the workings of Satan, and what is definitely the operation of our own corruption. We know nothing of his approach—but in some movement of our mind or heart against the will of God; and it is by resisting that movement that we are to resist the devil.

The means of opposition are clearly pointed out in the Scripture. "Whom resist steadfast in the faith," says one apostle, "above," or over "all, taking the shield of faith," says another, "whereby you shall be able to quench all the

fiery darts of the wicked." As one great part of our Christian conflict is with him, so the principal means by which he is to be resisted is FAITH. The figure employed by the apostle in comparing faith to a shield is a very beautiful and instructive one; and his direction to put it on *over* all the other parts of the armor is equally striking. The shield was useful in covering every part of the body—if the foe aimed his arrow at the head, the warrior could raise the shield to protect this important part; if he aimed it at the heart, the defense could be in an instant lowered to cover this also. And thus whether Satan aims to tempt our mind with plausible error, or our hearts by seductive sins, faith is equally useful.

Nor does this exhaust the beauty of the metaphor, for the shield covered not only all the parts of the body—but all the other parts of the armor. So faith extends its protecting influence to all the other graces. Who would care about the belt of sincerity, if he did not believe there was a God to see and reward all that he does? The breastplate of righteousness would lie neglected if we did not believe that holiness is pleasing to God, and essential to our happiness. We would never put on the shoes of holy peace without that faith which produces it. Hope would languish without faith; and the helmet remain suspended on the wall, instead of being placed on our head. The sword of the Spirit would repose in its scabbard, did not faith draw it out. The whole conflict with Satan is a fight of faith; and we thus account for the declaration of our Lord to Peter, "Simon, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

By faith, **we realize the existence and presence of God**, as the spectator and helper of our souls in the conflict, warning us by his holiness and justice against compliance with temptations, and encouraging us by his grace and truth to resist them. Faith helps us to realize a present God, as well as a present devil; compels us to say, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" and assists us to "endure as seeing Him who is invisible."

By faith, **we repair to the cross**, and bring to our aid all the power and might of the great atonement that was there made for sin. The cross of the Savior is the shelter and

defense, to which the poor tempted soul betakes herself when severely beset by the great adversary. There we see the evil of sin, in opposition to all the disguised lies with which the enemy endeavors to deceive and entrap us. There we see how God is engaged to our side by the great sacrifice of his Son, and are encouraged to expect his gracious support. There we see how completely we are rescued from the power of Satan, and are no longer his captives. There we learn that we are bought with a price and belong to Christ, and are bound to obey him as our faithful Lord, and to give up all the unfruitful works of darkness. There we see the power of the Spirit provided for us, to assist us in all our spiritual conflicts. There it is, that the believer, in holy indignation, and in magnanimous defiance, exclaims, "Get behind me, Satan; every drop of my Savior's blood proclaims my blessed freedom from your dominion, and my obligations to serve the Lord. I am more than conqueror through Him who has loved me."

By faith, we partake of the fruit and effect of Christ's victory over Satan. He gained a twofold conquest, one personal, in the **wilderness** to which he was led up by the Spirit to stand the shock, and where he was victorious, by himself—but not only *for* himself. It was as our Redeemer he endured that conflict, that he might, as it were, beat the enemy first, and lead us to battle with a conquered and humbled foe; thus extending to us the fruit of *his* victory, as well as teaching us how to gain one for ourselves. Christ's second victory was upon **Calvary**, when, upon his cross, "he spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it," Col. 2: 15. It was then "he bruised the serpent's head," and "through death destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil," Heb. 2: 14. Then he broke the power, and destroyed the dominion of Satan. **Satan may now molest us—but cannot at will destroy us.** It is a vanquished foe we fight with. Faith in this blessed truth gives courage, confidence, and spirit to the believer in resisting the wicked one.

By faith, we are assured of the truth, excellence, and importance of God's word, and thus oppose the whole Bible to Satan's darts. The doctrines and duties, the invitations and promises, the warnings and threatenings, are all useful

by turns. Are we tempted by the difficulties and mysteries of some of the doctrines—to disbelief, and error? Faith fixes her powerful eye upon the evidence of the truth, and with a "Thus says the Lord," to depend upon, receives the truth on the authority of Him who reveals it, and at the same time, conscious of its inability to comprehend even the most common matters in their full extent, bows the intellect into submission to the Scriptures, and admits, without gainsaying, whatever Divine wisdom has revealed.

It is **one of Satan's masterpieces** to induce men to take some one truth of Scripture, and to magnify its importance beyond all due bounds, and to exalt it not only above all other truths—but to the utter exclusion of them, thus founding error upon truth, and heresies upon the sacred Scriptures. Socinianism takes the humanity and example of Christ—but leaves out his Divinity and atonement. Mysticism, perverting the indwelling of the Spirit, insists on the inward light, to the neglect of the work of Christ, and the outward revelation. Antinomianism triumphs in free grace and justification by faith—but is negligent of good works; while self-righteousness is proud of good works to the neglect of faith. Rigid predestinarianism asserts the sovereignty of God to the subversion of man's freedom; while Pelagianism boasts of man's own sufficiency, to the denial of God's decrees and human dependence. But a simple faith takes the *whole* word, and thus repels the wiles of the tempter.

In like manner, when the temptation is to **sinful indulgence**, and when the father of lies urges all kinds of arguments, and furnishes all kinds of excuses for sin, such, for instance, as that it was committed by some of the Scripture worthies; that it is but a little offence, or a common one; that repentance can soon follow it; that there is no perfection here; that it is a part of the conflict for us to be occasionally defeated; that it need not be repeated—then faith meets the whole, by this one declaration, "It is still sin! God has forbidden it. How can I do this wickedness, and sin against the Lord?" Thus, as Christ himself overcame the tempter by quoting Scripture, so does the believer.

Faith conquers Satan by laying hold of the promises of help

and reward contained in the word. Paul was buffeted with a messenger from Satan. In his distress he knocked thrice at the door of heaven, and cried for help. All the answer he could get was, "My grace is sufficient for you," 2 Cor. 12:9. It was enough. With this he went to the conflict, and came off more than conqueror. And what was said to him, is said equally to us. With God's grace to help us, we need not fear the wicked one. We may seem little in his hands—but he is far less in the hands of God. **The lion from the bottomless pit is nothing before the Lion of the tribe of Judah!** He may be mighty—but he is not almighty. He may be formidable—but he is not invincible. We have a promise not only of help—but of victory. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," Rom. 16:20. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," James 4:7. Though he comes rampant and roaring, he shall, if resisted, depart in shame and confusion. And then there are also promises of a rich and eternal reward. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him," James 1:12. We shall soon put our foot upon the neck of this foe, and with the victor's crown upon our brow, exclaim, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And then faith leads to all other appropriate and incumbent duties. We should be much in prayer for Divine help. When we are weak—then we are strong. Prayer for God's Spirit is a confession of our weakness, and a reliance upon God's mightiness. It is thus we take hold upon God's strength. What is the monster spirit of hell, to the Spirit of God? Be much in prayer, then, and let this be one of your special petitions—to be delivered from the power of Satan. We never *feel* so strong, we never *are* so strong, as when we are bowing down before the throne of God. Satan has little hope of conquering the man whom he cannot draw away from his prayer closet. He regards him in that refuge, as in an impregnable fortress.

The apostle exhorts us also "to be sober and vigilant, because our adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." **Sobriety** means not merely a restraint upon our fleshly appetite, so as not to be

intoxicated with strong drink—but a restraint also upon the lusts of the mind, so as not to have the soul intoxicated with the love of the world. Many a man has a drunken soul, who never had a drunken body in his life. Beware of *spiritual* inebriety. Let us "take heed to ourselves, lest at anytime our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life," Luke 21:34. What can an intoxicated man do against a roaring lion? He can neither fight nor flee.

And we must add **vigilance** to sobriety. Watchfulness is an essential duty of the Christian life; none is more necessary; none more frequently or more solemnly enjoined. Who that is asleep can defend himself against a lion? How cautiously, how circumspectly should we walk, if we were in a country where wild beasts are common, and saw the footprints, and actually heard the roar of a lion. Such is our situation. See to it, then, that you *do* walk circumspectly—looking all round, watching every object, lest it conceal the enemy; your trials, your comforts, your occupations, your tastes, your pleasures, your thoughts, your desires, your besetting sins—and especially watch your hearts with all diligence. An unwatchful Christian is sure to be an unsuccessful one.

To SUM up all that I would inculcate on this awful subject, I would remark—

It is a **mysterious** one, and we should not allow a restless and unwholesome curiosity to pry further into it than God has seen fit to reveal. It is a **solemn** one, and should never be spoken of lightly or irreverently. It is a **scriptural** one, and should not be viewed with skepticism and distrust.

We should never allow ourselves to throw the blame of our sins upon Satan, nor in the smallest degree plead the strength and subtlety of his temptations, as an excuse for our guilt in complying with them; for though he may **entice**, he cannot **compel**.