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# The Sinlessness of Jesus

By

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## THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Heb. 4. 15.

This cardinal passage which asserts the sinlessness of Jesus, affirms not merely the testimony of the Scripture that Jesus was without sin (Heb. 4. 15), it leads further; it leads into the mysterious realm of the temptations of Jesus and his struggles with sin, and puts us thereby before the deepest and most tender problems in the question as to the sinlessness of Jesus.

Hebrews 4. 15 will give us the direction toward which we shall make our inquiry. Let us begin first with an examination of the passages on the sinlessness of Jesus.

### I. JESUS WITHOUT SIN ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

Without sin; this is the shining inscription under the life of Jesus. If the Lord had possessed only one dark spot, how spite-

fully and maliciously his enemies would have attacked him! But defiantly he can challenge them: "which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8. 46.)

With this judgment agree the sentiments of those who knew the Lord, such testimonies as we may particularly trust.

Judas, the child of perdition, after he committed the deed, how may he have tried to allay his conscience by remonstrating with himself that in the end Jesus may have deserved punishment. In the torment of his remorse, how may he have considered in his mind the years of intercourse with the Lord, wishing to find even a shadow of guilt in the Lord! But lamenting and accusing, he must exclaim: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27. 4).

Pilate; how much would he have given had he been able to discover even the slightest wrong in the Lord in order to be able to vindicate the condemnation of Jesus and at the same time extricate himself; but before his soul Jesus stands spotless, and in spite of the most thorough examination, he is obliged to confess: "I find no fault in him" (John 19. 4; Luke 43. 4, 14, 15, 22).

Even his wife is so certain of the integrity of Jesus that she warns her husband not to taint himself with the blood of the righteous (Matt. 27. 19).

The Roman centurion under the cross, while gazing on the person and death of Jesus, is obliged to confess: "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Matt. 27. 54; Mark 15. 39; Luke 23. 47).

The penitent thief who, like all criminals, has a clear eye for the innocency and purity of Jesus says: "This man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23. 41).

Still more abundant are the voices of those who daily associated with him, who not only heard his words and saw his deeds, but who could also look most deeply into his heart; to them he is "he who knew no sin," "who did no sin," "the just and holy" (Acts 3. 14; 8. 26; 2 Cor. 5. 21; 1 John 2. 1, 29, 37; 1 Peter 1. 19; 2. 21, 22; 3. 18; Heb. 7. 26, 27).

One cannot invalidate these testimonies of the disciples and friends of Jesus by saying that these men could not have applied the notion of sinlessness in absolute strictness to Jesus; they could only judge of the outer legality of Jesus, but could not see into his

heart; and besides, the moral estimate of actions is essentially dependent on the determining motives. What had been going on in the heart of Jesus, of this they had no knowledge.

But in analogy of the word (Matt. 7. 17 seq.), we may be allowed to reason at once from the goodness of life to the purity of motive, and to this responds the self-testimony of Jesus (John 8. 46). By no means did Jesus intend to say: "You can show me no sin." This were unworthy of him who well knew what is in man, and who in ethical matters felt so unspeakably fine and tender. And words like those of John 4. 34; 5. 17; 8. 29; 15. 10, assert Jesus's most rigid concentration upon God. He who asserts oneness with God (John 10. 30), as an expression of the divine nature; he who can designate himself as the spiritual image of the Father (John 14. 9), from him sin must be absolutely precluded.

Still another observation leads to this result. It cannot be denied that Jesus lifted the Jewish religion of the law, of the letter which opposes man from the outside, to the religion of freedom and of the Spirit. Only

that is truly good which is done from the whole heart and free love. Jesus thus transfers the pith of all religion to the disposition. How could the idea of such a religion have been born in the heart which yet somehow had the law beside or against itself, and which had caused displeasure to the will of God in any single point? The fostering soil of such an ethically perfect religion can only be a heart in which the free, moral impulse to every good has the exclusive dominion and becomes an act in every moment.

Nevertheless, some thought to find in certain deeds of Jesus, something morally offensive. Thus, for example, in the arbitrariness of the boy who remained in the temple. But no word indicates that the tarrying of the boy was wrong. The very words of the twelve-year-old boy show that the consciousness of his perfect fellowship with God and the rule of this consciousness over his entire thought and life was then already the leading principle, over against which consideration for men had to recede.

We need only to mention the large-heartedness of Jesus in his intercourse with publicans and sinners; his supposed encroachment

on the ownerships of others in the country of the Gadarenes—acts in which Jesus is simply true to his calling of saving the souls of men.

The cleansing of the temple by Jesus has been so misunderstood, that one has connected with it the notion of passion and violence. But he forgets that there this act was not an emanation of personal passion. The disciples as eye-witnesses had at any rate this impression when they applied to the Lord the words of the Scriptures: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2. 17). Here stands before us not an irritated personality, but the wrath of love free from all selfishness. The extraordinary calling of Jesus entitled him to act thus. Such an act, however, could not at all be accomplished without a deep and shocking sense of the offence. But such seriousness and zeal is purely human and humanly great.

In other times the sinlessness of Jesus seemed to be threatened by the inquiry into his capability of erring.

First of all we must assert that with reference to the Messianic end as well as with reference to the means to this end,

Jesus did not err or devote himself to illusions. At all events this hypothesis has no support from the time of his public ministry; and here it always depends whether we shall construct the picture of Jesus according to our conceptions and suppositions, or, whether we shall yield to historical reality. Measured by historical matter of fact, that theory is false which imputes to Jesus originally a Messianic plan with an admixed political tendency, and which afterward only makes him correct himself by the unfavorable turn of events.

Everything rather points to this, that from the beginning Jesus foresaw his end and was led by it in all his acts. His way hidden from the beginning; his modest appearance which is so little imposing that the Baptist wonders and is offended at it; his baptism, with the significant word of John; his selection of the disciples; his avoidance of every semblance of making the most of his miracles and signs which goes so far that he forbade those whom he had healed to publish the news, and after certain events withdraws from the enthusiasm of the people; the non-performance of every ex-

periment, of every manifestation which could glorify himself; the harshness of his demands (Luke 14. 25 seq.) and his aversion to hypocrisy or compromises (Matt. 23. 15), make it clear that from the beginning Jesus did not waver. The fate of the Baptist, the history of Jerusalem, the murderess of kings and prophets, predicted his catastrophe, and the preaching of the kingdom (Matt. 13) already expresses the attitude of Jesus prepared for failure for the understanding of which he educates his disciples.

In the face of these historical facts from the life of Jesus, it must be regarded as fantasy that Jesus should have labored under an error concerning the plan of his kingdom. This belongs to the necessary spiritual inventory of his Messianic equipment. He saw here clearly and took no wrong course. This, however, does not preclude that in unforeseen or unexpected matters Jesus could err.

We may state that liability to error is not an irregular sign of being human. Holding fast to the humanity of Jesus, his liability to error is thereby also given, and this possibility is simply established in his real hu-



man mental life. His inner life also grew step by step and ripened into a perfect manhood (Luke 2. 40, 42, 52). His soul is therefore also a finite quantity and is confined to temporal and spatial limits; its development also progresses under certain national, physical, geographical, climatic conditions. Hence it follows that Jesus, without prejudice to his infallibility in the sphere of revelation, could err in the peripheric sphere; and in testifying of his ignorance concerning the time and hour of the last judgment, Jesus himself acknowledged the limits of human prophecy<sup>1</sup> (Matt. 24. 36). Whoever is offended at this, forgets that perfection in the matters at issue belongs not to his office, and therefore a defect therein cannot consequently be a reproach to him. The office of Jesus is exclusively religious; he will be nothing but the man of faith and obedience, the man after the heart of God, in whom the divine consciousness comprehends and fills all, the bearer of everything which belongs to the certainties of right re-

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<sup>1</sup> Nescience is not error. Error is a wrong act or state of mind. Jesus shows no error in not knowing what is or what may be unknowable, and, with respect to all else, over against the abstract "I can" is the ever energetic "I will not." [Editor.]

lations between God and man, to the execution of the divine decree of love to Jesus. This is the central, the fundamental, idea. He will be no less but also, no more.<sup>1</sup>

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## II. JESUS TEMPTED LIKE OURSELVES

When we speak of sinlessness we do not mean thereby the metaphysical property, the being lifted absolutely beyond every possibility of evil which would admit neither of a being tempted nor of moral development. But by sinlessness we understand only the ability not to sin and not to have sinned. Had God from the start made it impossible for Jesus to sin, he could not at all have been able to give himself to God in free self-decision and to will the good. Each temptation would have been for him a perfectly indifferent, meaningless event; yea, his entire development could not altogether be called truly human. And it becomes inconceivable how, in the Scripture, Jesus could still be presented as our example in whose steps we should follow. A sinful man, who only

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<sup>1</sup> See Ullman's *The Sinlessness of Jesus*.

bravely bears up against sin, seems more suitable as an example than a sinless Jesus who, completely inviolable, had of course cast off, so to speak, all temptations of Satan and sin. Indeed, the possibility to sin belongs to the truth of the human nature which we must not explain away in a docetic fashion. We will admit, without question, that temptation without the possibility of falling, is no temptation.

But now it is said: Jesus was in all points tempted like ourselves. These words do not permit us to combine with the notion "Temptation" another idea, as if the temptations of Jesus were of another kind than ours. On the contrary, these words mean to say that Jesus has a life behind him, in which in all relations he has been equally tempted like ourselves; and, if so, that according to Hebrews 4. 15 the many attacks and temptations enabled Jesus to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, that he alone can have pity on us, who really suffers with us.

Had Jesus himself not suffered under the temptations of life, had it not been necessary for him to take into account the possibility

of falling, he could never have learned pity, sympathy, that kindly disposed feeling toward the sinner. But because he himself experienced in himself the weakness of human nature and the temptations to which we are exposed in this sinful world, the inner power accrued to him to put himself in our condition and to have a true, living, sympathetic fellow-feeling with us (Heb. 2. 17, 18).

It is impossible that the temptations of Jesus could have been merely outward acts, sham temptations, which from the start had to recoil from him because he stood on the unassailable height of absolute holiness. On the contrary, the temptations must have seized him also inwardly; must have brought sufferings and struggles to him. For this reason we must also speak of his susceptibility to temptation in the world's full meaning; of the necessity of fighting against sin with the possibility of falling.

It may indeed be difficult for us to imagine Jesus, as Luther says, as one who has trouble in keeping away Satan; but without this suggestion, all that we hear concerning Jesus's temptation is without meaning and

purpose. The heroic grandeur of a soul devoted to God, consists not in this, that from the start it is impossible for it to decide against God and His will, but rather in this that it lays hold of the will of God, though it requires a struggle.

All that the historical, biographical portrait of Jesus exhibits of temptations corresponds with this.

The history of the temptation at the beginning of his public ministry is already significant. If one here wishes from the very start to eliminate the eventual decision on the part of the tempter as an impossibility, let him not be afraid of the inference, that the whole incident is for Jesus nothing but delusion. But when the angels came and ministered unto him, does this not mean that peace and safety returned in the consciousness of Jesus? And where peace comes, struggle, at least settlement with the temptation, has preceded. And the counterpart at the end of his life, at Gethsemane, is it not telling of the bitter seriousness of the temptation which disturbed Jesus! "Not my will, but Thy will," this word is the triumphal song after hard, inner struggle. And

what do we make of Jesus himself when we deprive his word to the disciples: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations" (Luke 22. 28) of every forcible character!

After all, it can no more be doubtful that Jesus was tempted like ourselves; that the possibility in him was not merely an abstraction. His life accordingly, must have had also an entirely different, a more uniform course. But some think that the outward life of Jesus had never been disturbed in its harmony. Strauss has called it the "Hellenic in Jesus." But he overlooks the thought of a vigorous, true development. Such a picture of Jesus gives it a character of stiffness and immobility. It must not be forgotten that the soul of Jesus was susceptible of deep emotions.

All the evangelists tell us of instances in which Jesus exhibited great feeling, as for example, at the sepulchre of Lazarus, where the groaning in the spirit is connected with physical manifestation (John 11. 33-38). According to this Jesus showed forth a tender, sentimental nature. Thus also we understand the rejection of Peter in its pe-

cular keenness (Matt. 16. 23). It can only be understood when Peter's demand excited his sensitiveness and the possibility of his own flesh and blood being tempted to avoid the cross.

Likewise we notice in John 6. 15, when the people desired to make him a king, Jesus departs in order to avoid temptation.

He did not rush to martyrdom nor did he provoke it wildly. So long as it were possible, he avoided the danger (John 7. 1; 11. 54). What awaits him at the end of his saving task puts a burden on him which is not so easy for him.

The Scripture hesitates to ascribe to Jesus the strongest expressions of the humanly natural fear of death (Heb. 5. 7). The bitterness of his death overcomes him so intensely that for a time it dominates his thought and feeling; and, in spite of the people who surround him, he must relieve his mind in the words: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour" (John 12. 27). In the prayer-struggle, which is not free from doubts, he prepares for his end. Like a flood the fate of his death surges over his

soul when he cries: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" These facts throw a bright light on the really human, physical, internal and mental life of Jesus and clearly show that he was tempted like ourselves.

We must here raise the question: Is the picture of the sinless Jesus not shaken by this statement of fact? Do the statements concerning the sinlessness of Jesus not require a correction? How can Jesus be tempted in all points as we are, and yet remain without sin? If we actually and seriously had to deal with temptation, does not at least a minimum of sinfulness redound on him? Has not temptation for us, as a rule, a sinfully retarding, corrupting influence? How can both be harmonized, that he was tempted in all points as we are and yet, at the same time, remained without sin? This is the problem which must be solved.

### III. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION

In spite of all the seriousness of the temptation, Jesus can only have remained without sin provided the temptation came to him



not from himself, not from within, but from without. This *a priori* opinion is confirmed by the historical picture of Jesus. Whenever we hear of the temptations of Jesus we never hear that they proceeded from his own heart. Temptations came to him from his nearest surroundings. His mother tempted him (John 2. 41); his brothers (John 7. 1 seq.; Mark 3. 21); Peter (Matt. 14. 22); his people (John 6); the scribes (Matt. 22. 35; Mark 12. 28, 34; Luke 10. 25); the devil (Luke 4. 13); his sufferings become a temptation to him—temptations, all of which are brought to him from without.

It is, therefore, the sense of the Scripture when we absolve Jesus from his own temptations; and rightly so. Had the tempting pictures arisen from his own heart, as, for example, the history of the temptation describes them, the bottom of his heart were a home of evil thoughts and Jesus could never more be considered as sinless. Had he to overcome only one indwelling tendency to evil, he were already defiled just by this, perfect as we may conceive him to be. If with Kant we acknowledge already the propensity to sin, the sinful disposition, as an

innate dowry of our empirical nature, it is clear that we must absolve Jesus from this inheritance and must consider him sinlessly constituted from his birth. Jesus could not be tempted from his own inherent issue of sin. The word (Jas. 1. 14) "of his own lust" relates only to us.

With this correspond the other statements of Scripture. Whoever limits the text (2 Cor. 5. 21) of knowing no sin, only to occurring deeds of sin, but considers evil inclinations as not precluded, does no justice to the Lord who separates so strictly and keenly between good and evil, and who calls him a sinner already who commits adultery in his heart, who hates his brother or is angry at him. Had the least inclination of sinful lust been in Jesus himself, the father of sin had had something in him. He is not like ourselves who offer to temptations the inborn propensity to deception.

Thus understood, Jesus was differently organized from his birth than we are. The Scripture also does justice to this factor. When Paul characterizes the human side of Jesus (Rom. 8. 3), with the words: "In the likeness of sinful flesh," he certainly does

not do away by this term with every difference between the flesh of Christ and that of sin. He could have accomplished this better by merely writing "in sinful flesh." The term must rather put beside equality an inequality. Since in other statements Paul briefly speaks of Christ's descent "according to the flesh" (Rom. 1. 3; 11. 5; comp. Col. 1. 22; 2 Tim. 3. 16; John 4. 2); the equality must consist in this, that it was not sinful flesh. Like ours, therefore, though "among men" (Heb. 5. 1; John 8. 40; 1 Tim. 2. 5), yet he is at the same time "in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2. 7). And though he also had "the weakness of the flesh" (2 Cor. 13. 4; 1 Pet. 3. 18), he was yet only "in the likeness of sinful flesh."

And, moreover, what we hear concerning the history of the infancy of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, concerning his virgin birth and his being conceived by the Holy Ghost, points to this, that Jesus claims at the roots of his existence an exceptional position, since at his entrance into humanity God himself intervened creatively and through His Spirit severed him from connection with sinful nature. Already in the

natural ground of his individual life he has the direct impress of divinity.

To this answers the history of the infancy and boyhood of Jesus. Here, too, we hear nothing of any troubling of his divine consciousness. Had any inner struggles preceded his public ministry, they would have destroyed the inner life-harmony of Jesus. Sin can never be so eradicated that it does not subsequently shew its after-effects upon the moral consciousness. A guilty conscience always makes one anxious, and some crises in the early life of Jesus ought to have left traces and scars in his later life or ought, at least, to have entailed a trait of sad recollection, a want of security and gladness betraying itself. Even Paul, in spite of the certainty of salvation surpassing time and space (Rom. 8. 28 seq.), cannot get rid of the thought of the dark guilt of his Pharisaical past (1 Cor. 15. 9; 1 Tim. 1. 12). Of this there is no trace in Jesus. His moral power shines before us in original freshness and purity. The word of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple is significant of the consciousness of his unity with God which was troubled by nothing. And, according to

the testimony of the Baptist at the baptism, and above all after his refusal to perform the baptism, Jesus had to confess no sin. All this necessitates the affirmation that Jesus was originally a being endowed with a vigor which possessed a moral faculty in its original integrity and in keeping with this, a capacity which developed itself from the beginning.

So far Heb. 4. 15 experiences an important modification. In spite of the vastest equalization of the temptations of Jesus with ours, a difference still remains. One class of temptations which is found in us, was not found in Jesus. No temptation existed for Jesus from an inherent, sinful desire already found in him. There was not in him a disposition to sin which must first be overcome. From the beginning, rather, he was free from all proneness to sin. Temptation found no sin in him.

But do we really withdraw everything which we asserted from the beginning concerning the reality of the temptations in the life of Jesus? Under this psychological supposition can there yet be the question of temptation without the existence of evil,

without anything in us which sympathizes with temptation? Do we not thereby preclude the reality of the moral struggle and by it the reality of being tempted? Can there be a question at all of a growing strong in the good, of vigorous progress, unless such advancement goes hand in hand with continual repulsion of the evil originally inherent in life?

We must maintain that sin is not at all essentially necessary for the development of human personality. True, sin belongs to our empirical nature; but reason and conscience attest that our actual nature is abnormal on this point. Sin is an anomaly, a contradiction to our idea. And no one will assert that the more we sin, the more human we become; on the contrary, the less we have to do with sin, the nearer we come to the ideal of humanity.

This ideal we find personified in Jesus. For him sin is not an inborn quantity; but for all that he did not possess from the beginning the perfection which excluded advancement. Moral progress consists not merely in the negative, that one is evermore free from sin; it needs also something posi-

tive, a growth and a getting strong in the good. The negative moment of growth ceases in the case of Jesus. But it lies in the nature of the good that it becomes and grows out of itself; it must be apprehended and maintained. Though that which forms the uniqueness of Jesus is originally in him, yet it exists only as disposition. This disposition, however, can only be developed by voluntary action. His innocent, and from principle, divinely directed but not yet tested and approved will, Jesus must in a concrete way first divinely appoint and develop into character. For this reason he has ever to choose and to learn. Moral perfection, he had to obtain first (Heb. 2. 10; 5. 8, 9); only the exalted is being made perfect (Heb. 7. 28). He too had to be godly and faithful toward his God (Heb. 3. 2; 5, 7). On this account he is also called "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12. 2). He too had to learn obedience (Heb. 5. 8). This very word is especially significant for the unique course of the development of Jesus. He learned obedience, that is, he rose not from disobedience to obedience, but step by step, from obedience to obedience. The

obedience which existed from the beginning, became strong by every more difficult trial. By every new sense of resignation and submission to the will of God, his obedience was proved anew, and each proof of obedience meant a strengthening of his moral development and at the same time, also an advance. It is growth in the good which also took place in Jesus. This development in an ascending line is especially illustrated by the word from the lips of the youthful Jesus (Luke 2. 40, 52). The prayerful struggle in Gethsemane also reveals to us the secret of his progress. The comparison of the second prayer with the first prayer, denotes already a growth in obedience. There is a pure moral development where the evil needs not to be the negative condition of all prayer, a development which on this account is no less painful. We must yet give an account of that which gave the stimulus to the development of Jesus. What could impede his progress in growth?

Now, what inclination was lacking in himself to evil, is richly outweighed by his relationships in common and at the same time his opposition to a world with which he was



vitally associated. Over against this world he had first to acquire compassionate mercy in overflowing measure (Heb. 2. 17). This was already necessary in the small circle of the disciples whose unsusceptibility to discern as compared with the eagerness of the Master, was so often manifested. Also his hardships associated with emotions of displeasure, innocent in themselves, his homelessness, his hunger and thirst, could become for him a temptation. Above all the increasing hardening of his people, the envy and hatred of the Jewish authority, the slander, hypocrisy, enmity, malice, unfaithfulness, betrayal, denial, which he experienced, might have served to drive him into bitterness, impatience, dejection, despair and sadness. But this called forth the highest moral exertion of his soul, his full energy of will. The Lord suffered this not with stoical indifference, for his real human nature linked him with the world. Though the Lord did not carry about himself the sinfulness of the human nature, with its evil inclinations, yet he shared its natural weakness (2 Cor. 13, 4), which is by no means sin in itself, but which made him susceptible to the impure

elements and pernicious influences of the world, so that everything which causes sin in us, could also tempt him. He, too, had to fight against it and them and could have gone over to a positive sin for which, not the stimulus, but the power was in him.

The question must still be answered which makes the extremest point of the problem. Whether Jesus, in spite of this fleshly complexity with a sinful world still remained without sin? For it need only to be mentioned that, in case the existence of sin in Jesus is denied, this includes not only the actual sin which appears, but also the inner sin—sin in mere thought and volition, the deepest and most secret emotion of the mind. Was Jesus sinless in the fullest sense of the word? Is not temptation rather always allied with an at least transient sin of the mind?

According to Heb. 4. 15 Jesus was tempted like ourselves in the above qualified sense but that he remained without sin. There is thus a limit on this side of which the temptation is without sin; on the other side it passes over into sin. Where is the point in temptation where sin commences, or the

temptation itself becomes sin? We reply: It is not where temptation from the outside world represents itself to the human consciousness and is imagined by it. The thought of the evil is in itself indifferent; it were indeed sin were it produced in the soul of man himself. But, as we have seen, the latter is precluded in the case of Jesus. In him his heart was pure throughout. But the thought of evil is not to be judged as sin when it is offered to the human mind from the outside, but finds a decided, complete opposition in the moment of its realization; so that it cannot fix itself in any way. We must also say that there is no sin yet in the temptation where physical agitation arises through suffering, which under circumstances might also bring about an ungodly turn of mind and bias of the will, but is here overcome by the higher, moral power.

On the other hand, there is a point where temptation becomes sin; where one makes advances to evil with a sympathizing disposition; for then it gets a footing in the heart of man, and seeks to make a real impression upon his mind and to become somehow decisive in his life. It affects feeling

and imagination; perverts and troubles the moral judgment; kindles a discord in man; invites him to withdraw from the government of the higher principles and to separate himself from the divine order of life.

Considering the historical appearance of Jesus under this point of view, it is conceivable how he could be tempted without sin. The temptation burst in upon him in its entire reality to lead him away from the path of the divine, but victoriously and sinlessly he opposed it, and sin could not force its way into his personality and defile him morally. This we see plainly in the history of the temptation.

One may understand the story as he pleases, but this much is certain: According to the view of the Gospels, Jesus had thoroughly to test the Messianic ideal which the public mind offered to him. This very story allows us to cast an exceedingly instructive glance into the mental life of Jesus. From the beginning Jesus possessed no supernatural perfectness; step by step he had to examine erroneous Messianic views, in order to see through them completely. He was also subject to the law of learning which

was not possible without correcting notions and expectations of his time. What was expected of him, according to the narrative of the temptation, was actually in the line of that which his contemporaries expected of the Messiah; and because Jesus was a child of the public mind at that time, he could not reject from the outset the Messianic picture of the people as a dream.

The question which concerns us is this, whether Jesus in this temptation incorporated into his own sphere of ideas, his perfectly moral purity. Two things must be observed. In the first place these temptations were not the fantasies of his own mind. The Scripture takes this into account by opposing in an objective way, Satan to the Lord. The mistaken Messianic idea was not procured by Jesus himself, it was so to speak in the mental air which he inhaled when he was about to appear publicly as the Messiah. He could not grasp and appropriate the true Messianic idea without refusing and rejecting another. The false Messianic idea was an objective matter of fact for the Lord. Thinking of a matter of fact can not defile, however, so long as it

exercises no alluring influence upon feeling and will. This is the other force which must be emphasized. But even this cause ceases in the case of Jesus. And what is the positive outcome of the temptation-struggle?

1. Jesus will not apply the higher powers given to him to his own interest, and for the supply of his physical need, anticipate, perhaps, the help of God.

2. Jesus will not go self-chosen ways, thereby petulantly inviting God's wondrous power; he will not compel men to acknowledge his Messiahship by a visible conquest, or even by working of miracles.

3. Jesus will not become faithless to his God and accept from the evil one, were it only the least help, in order to establish by force and deceit, his dominion over the world.

Let us see how Jesus asserts these principles over against the demands of Satan. It is surprising how decidedly and heedlessly Jesus asserts his conviction. He enters into no dispute with Satan. Where another would have to overcome an inner struggle, we see not the least wavering on his part. These refusals have the character of definite-

ness, of what cannot be otherwise. Jesus does not hesitate about the answer, but is at once ready with the defence. As soon as the enticement presents itself to his thinking, it is immediately driven out by the power of his spirit. On this account evil could not defilingly enter his heart, it merely remained in the realm of thought. No coveting, or hesitating, or wavering, or pleasurable dwelling upon tempting phenomenon took place. The instantaneous breaking down of the thought preserved his purity of soul. The close of the narrative confirms this, "The angels came and ministered unto him." These words evidently express the mental disposition of Jesus, and denote the reflection of his inner victories. In him lives the consciousness of a peace with God disturbed by nothing.

Just so it is at the end of his life where we shall look still deeper into the struggle with the temptations to which Jesus was exposed. The prelude to Gethsemane in Jerusalem (John 12. 27-30) shows the Lord already in deep, struggling passion. In Jerusalem, as well as in Gethsemane, it is the fear of death which like a dead weight burdens his

soul. At each crisis nature resists the dying with such power that its necessity became doubtful for the Lord. In Jerusalem so much so that Jesus must ask himself whether he should beseech the Father to be delivered from this hour of anguish. But immediately he has appreciated the necessity of the sacrifice and subordinated his will to that of his Father that His name might be glorified. Here also the purity of his soul is not troubled by the least desire to follow temptation. Here at Jerusalem the struggle is so momentary and the victory so complete, that Jesus could say when the voice came from heaven, that it happened not for his sake but for the sake of the people.

It is otherwise in Gethsemane. There the struggle was threefold. Here the thought of the approaching suffering had thrown the Lord back into such an intense inner struggle that at the first prayer he asks indeed to be delivered by God; and the words: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," revealed how deeply Jesus felt at this moment. This might seem as if the Lord had here lost something of his moral height and power.



But this weakness of the flesh in itself is not yet sin, but is simply founded in what is perishable and capable of suffering in human nature. The dread of the death of the fresh life which is found in every healthy organism, like hunger and thirst, is not to be regarded as a sinful emotion or even as weakness or cowardice, so long as it does not affect the temper and character. This, however, was not the case with Jesus.

What took place at this moment in the soul of Jesus? Certainly not this, that it is his suffering which constitutes here his temptation; indeed this is not the meaning of the prayerful question whether it is possible to save him from this hour. Jesus does not think at all of this possibility, but it is the "how" of his suffering which troubles him; the realization of that which the human race was about to do; that it prepared to reject him who alone could save it, and thus fill up the measure of its iniquity! He saw himself handed over to the malice and brutality of men. This then was the end of his life; that he was to suffer the extreme of evil by the hand of those whom he had sought for years in never-denying faithfulness!

With dread he looks down into this unexampled lost condition of his people whom he could not cease to love. Was it weakness when the sensitive nature of Jesus recoiled from this cruel blindness of his people, when in his love he wished that men would not perform on him this extreme atrocity, and therefore prays: "All but this! Father, is it possible"? Jesus would not have had a heart full of love, if this invincible hatred had not made the deepest shocking impression on him! But the sorrow of love over hatred is no sin; the struggling of the purest divine mind against the meanness of the world is no cowardice. On the contrary, out of this seeming human weakness shines forth the matchless glory of Jesus. Recoiling from the cup of the Father brought forth only the purest, most loving feelings. We never saw so clearly before the bottom of Jesus's truly human and at the same time divine mental life. That he trembles to the secret fibers of his being when thinking of the path of suffering which opens before him, is only truly human and natural, especially in this moment when the terrible and unavoidable is immediately impending. As yet

Jesus has nothing tangible against which he could struggle; it means the hardest moment, the pausing, immediate expectation of the fearful.

And yet, we hear nothing of any bitterness or impatience, no complaint of the wickedness of men. One thing only speaks, the sorrow of love which asks the Father whether there is no other way to death than this heart-breaking way. This question shows indeed that the knowledge of his end which was certain to him long ago had been darkened in his consciousness in this moment of deepest agitation. But at the same time, did Jesus waver for one moment? It was as if he recoiled from the slightest self-will over against God; for he only asks conditionally for the avoidance of this cup: "Father, if it be possible." Here also his will is immovably directed toward the Father; no conflict of will, no wavering between obeying and disobeying took place. Though the natural and purely human fear of suffering most keenly struggled against the endurance of the physical torments which awaited him; though the will of his weak flesh at this moment was so astir as

never before, Jesus nevertheless, submitted his natural will to this higher will, always agreeing with the will of his Father. He may tremble at the terrors of his way to death; he may even ask for that which is possible with God; but it does not come to this that the temptation had any determining influence on his mind, or gave his will even for a moment a direction contrary to the divine will. One thing was certain with him: his will was anchored in God. No storm could tear it from its ground though the waves rise never so high! Under the shadows of death coming nearer and nearer, his soul tremblingly presses through to the knowledge: "It is not possible." The conviction of the necessity of his dying obtains the upper hand, and now the will of the Father is also his own will: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." And his farewell from Gethsemane expresses the complete, unviolated, victorious power of his soul. The determination with which he meets his accusers; the calmness with which he bears his torments; the word directed to Peter who takes the sword, with his reference to the necessity that the Scriptures must be ful-

filled, show his heroic grandeur which nothing could shake, which remained intact although his life was thrown to and fro like a little ship on the wild tide.

Jesus loses nothing of his moral grandeur when on the cross he cried: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" This word expresses indeed the extreme sensation of the whole fearful power of the bodily experience which seemingly overcame Jesus. Nevertheless the address: "My God!" shows that here speaks not one who impatiently doubts, who is done with himself, his God and his cause, but that he who prays is a believer who clings to his God even in the most terrible depth, one who obediently submits to this word of Scripture because he knows that he hereby brings to an end the decree of the Father.

This much ought to result as a solution of our problem, that both statements concerning the sinless Jesus in Hebrews 4. 15 are consistent with each other, without colliding with each other; that Jesus could be tempted to sin yet remained without sin in the strictest sense of the word. By looking into his life we find both the great powers

that assail him, and at the same time, the still more powerful moral strength with which they are held. He remained invulnerable in the struggle. In all temptations to which he was exposed, evil never gained the mastery in any direction or in any degree, nor had brought him in conflict with himself. He always asserted himself with the whole energy of his holy force of will. Forgetful of himself he sought only the will of his Father. He is never induced to act arbitrarily or wilfully. He does nothing of himself (John 5. 17, 30). Obediently he goes hand in hand with God. No self-denial is too great for him. He could indeed have asked the Father to send him more than twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26. 53); he could well do otherwise, but would not; the possibility never became a reality, but is removed in every critical moment through the divine in him. The divine necessity, already alive in the twelve-year-old boy, always resounded in all decisions in his life (Matt. 26. 54; Luke 14. 26). Whatever may affect and tempt him, his infallible inner, virtuous power always comes out from the tests of conflict. Where the noblest

man even might have become embittered and indignant, he lost nothing of grandeur or peace. How mild is his rebuke about the disciples who were so slow in understanding and so captive to the worldly expectations of the Jews (Matt. 17. 7). For Jerusalem's impenitence he has only the complaint of rejected love (Luke 19. 42). For fallen Peter, only a sorrowful glance (Luke 23. 61). The greater the wrong which he experienced, the greater was the divine manifestation of his divine life which never gives up the world. When the final test comes, his love is stronger than death! Having loved his own, he loves them to the end (John 13. 1-15). What consideration, forbearance and tenderness toward Judas, even when he is taken captive! (Matt. 26. 49, 50.) How is this love enhanced from the time when his ministering humility was manifested by washing the feet of his disciples on to the crucifixion, when he prays for his murderers! (Luke 23. 34.)

Thus his mind and will remained free from every affection of sin; free from everything out of harmony with God. If Jesus had felt only the least guilty conscience, it

would have appeared at his death. But the very seven words he spoke from the cross revealed the Lord in his moral supreme majesty and force the verdict that the human self-consciousness was here completely merged in the divine consciousness, without any remnant.

Again in the story of the rich young man (Matt. 11. 16 seq.; Mark 10. 17 seq.; Luke 17. 18) Jesus in refusing the predicate "Good," did not intend to designate concessions or make confessions of sin, meaning, that in sorrowful feeling he honored God as alone being good, retaining that state exclusively for himself. Had Jesus intended this, he would have simply sent away the young man with the negative answer that all aspiration for eternal good is after all useless, since none but God could ever attain the end. But Jesus shows the young man the very way to perfection and this in a manner which wholly identifies himself with the Father and His will. In contradiction to the young man who asked what must one do to obtain eternal life, thinking that it would emancipate himself from the A B C of the divine will, in place of which he would con-



sent to do extraordinary "good" things, and therefore addressed Jesus in the expectation that he might perhaps show him another way than the traditional, through which he might obtain by tricks eternal life, though evading the divine law—over against all such thoughts Jesus emphasizes the divine commandments and thus connects himself indissolubly with the Father as the only "Good" one. On this account Jesus resists the over-liberal use of the word "good"; since he finds in this designation a presumption which he refuses for himself. For "good" in the full sense of the word, that is moral perfection, is only God himself, the ethical absolute, who need not become this first by overcoming an evil tempting him; since he cannot be tempted with evil (Jas. I. 13), being on the other side of good and evil. Not so Jesus, who is still on the way; whose development is not yet perfected. Though he knew no sin, he is yet moral in embryo, learning obedience; who is not yet exempted from temptations; but only through earnest struggling with temptations, can come to perfection.

Thus understood, the Lord himself con-

firms here everything that can be said of the sinless Jesus in the temptations. In conformity with the other statements of the Scripture, Jesus acknowledges here his relation to us which consists in this, that he, like ourselves, must advance toward the goal of perfectness but indeed with this unquestionable difference that through every possible temptation of life he preserved the closest unity with God, and therefore remained without sin, in accordance with his originally divine purpose.











