

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The devil is a liar. You cannot have more than one god no matter how many times the he says that he does not mind. You will either worship the God of Abraham or you will worship the devil. There are no other choices. And the devil gets not just the out-and-out witches and Satanists. He gets all the undecided, all the fence-riders, all the lukewarm pretenders, all those who worship no gods, and all those who worship false gods. He wants Jesus to have bread and honor and be spared His suffering so that men would go without Jesus' Word.

The devil says to Our Lord: **“You shouldn’t have to do this. It is not your fault. When Israel was in the desert they grumbled and complained! They picked their bread and quail off the ground and hungered for cucumbers in Egypt. They are not worthy of your gifts. Look here and see. These stones could be bread for you, pleasing to the eye, good for food. You have the power and the right. Take care of yourself. Be God. Let me have the men. They’ll never bother you again. I’ll be their god. And you can bet that I won’t be going hungry in the desert! I won’t be serving them.”**

But Jesus does what Adam, Moses, and Israel, what you, did not. He resists. He is tempted but He is not overcome. He does not sin. He suffers in His obedience for their disobedience and lives perfectly by His Word. The Father will provide. The Son will wait. Led into the place of temptation by the Spirit, He submits to His Father and knows hunger and shame. The Lord provides for Him not by removing the burden, but by offering Him up. He goes silently as a Lamb to the slaughter without complaint, without bread, without honor, without friend. Nothing is stored up for Him in heaven. There is no grace, no justice, no relief for Him. The Father answers the Son by sacrificing Him in order to give the Spirit to the failures who went

before Him: to Adam, Moses, and Israel, and to the failures who follow: you.

The Christ goes alone to pay for sins He did not commit. He turns the other cheek. He allows them to force a crown of thorns down upon His brow, to drive nails into His hands and feet. He lets Satan do his worst; have his day; take his price - but then! Then! Then the price is paid. The ransom made. The sacrifice complete. He has loved the world to the very end. And there is no more. He has satisfied the Law's demands. He has removed the guilt and shame of the same. He takes up His power. He rises from the dead. He is the Victory over Satan in the desert, in Galilee and Judah and on Golgotha. He is the Victor, alive, out of the grave, over death.

His power is greater, stronger, than that of the devil. It's not like the powers of men and the devil, which are always in some sense the power to destroy and seek vengeance, powers of violence. Of course, men and devils don't color their power that way. That is why we call them deceptive and tempting. Don't be naive. The President's power rests upon the strength of the armed forces, as do all governments in this world. All presidents have ruled, by violence and threat of violence. If he were a man of peace he would be toppled in a instant. This isn't a criticism. King David was also a man of violence. He rules in the kingdom of God's left hand, in the kingdom of Law. This is the character of the fallen world. Here is the point, if the President is a man of violence, the Lord Jesus Christ is not. He is the Prince of Peace. The President rules by violence and threat of violence. But the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the rule of grace.

The power of Jesus Christ makes no threats, gives no empty promises, puts no one in prison, requires no taxes. It is the greatest power and the power of earthly kingdoms is unworthy of comparison. For the power of the Lord Jesus Christ reveals its strength in forgiveness. He rules by grace with love. He makes citizens for His Kingdom by declaring former rebels to be His own dear children and washes them in the waters of Baptism. Satan's fantasy of killing God came true but proved to be his utter defeat. Failures, losers, cowards,

weaklings the world over and through time were set free from their shame and welcomed back into God's embrace!

You are the beloved of the Father forever. You live out your days in this wilderness in weakness, knowing hunger and shame, being attacked by the devil. *Why weakness, why hunger and shame?* Because the student is not above his Teacher. God hides saints in sinners. You follow Him in the Way of the Cross. For it is not by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God that you live. He provides that Word-infused bread for you. So that you do not go to slaughter. You are not alone. Your sins are forgiven. You are holy, righteous, innocent, without blame. But still, you have not fully arrived, the good work begun in you is not yet complete. You are not home. You are still suffering in this barren place full of sin and temptation, full of sorrow and death. And so with bread God gives His Word for life, out of His mouth and into yours. He does not give bread alone, for that is not enough for life. He gives Himself, the Word made Flesh, in the bread, that you would persevere and live. He joins you in the battle. He encourages, strengthens, and nourishes. Out of your mouth then comes the Word He placed inside of you, praise of His mercy, the pious **“amen,”** and you are clean.

The pastor holds what looks like bread before your eyes. He says: **“The Body of Christ.”** And you say: **“Amen,”** That is, **“It is true. It is good. It is for me. Thanks be to God. He loves me. He endured all things for me. He feeds me not with bread alone but with Himself and makes me His holy Temple of grace. He has not forgotten me. He attends and serves me. He is for me! This is His Body. Amen, amen!”**

This is what the devil does not understand. This is who the Messiah is, how He desires to be known. He is anointed for a Sacrifice, is the Lamb that God provides to make men His. He is caught in His compassion, in His desire to have you. He does it all - hungers in the desert, carries His cross to Golgotha, is mocked by the soldiers - all for you. For this is what it took - His holy Incarnation, His fasting and temptation, His suffering, dying, and rising -to make

you His. You are a Bride so beautiful, so precious, that the Bridegroom of grace pays the dowry Himself to have you.

It is the not the way of power and might. It is not at all like the imaginary gods designed by men. You may have heard some armchair theologian argue along the way that all religions are the same. They all want to make men behave. It is not true. Our religion is not a religion of obedience, but of forgiveness. Our goal is not to get you to behave but simply that you would hear the saving Word of Christ. The Lord Jesus received and ate with sinners.

There are no alliterated strategies or secrets that will stop you from sinning on this side of glory, that will stop you from hurting yourself and those you love, or which will grant you sudden prosperity. Christianity is the way of weakness, substitution, and mercy. But there is an answer to temptation. I know you are eager for it. Because nothing bothers Christians more than their failing struggle against sin. *Why do you keep sinning? Why don't you do what you want to do and instead do the evil you don't want?* The bookstores profit from this. But there is no secret, complicated formula, no magical prayer. The answer is simply this: Jesus loves you. That is it. Jesus suffered for you. He has forgiven all your sins and they are not coming back. In the coming Day it will be revealed to all of creation that you are a son of God, well-pleasing to Him. What you suffer now, which is not just pain and sorrow but also temptation and failure, is not worthy of comparison to the glory that will be revealed in you. Behold, even now, you are surrounded, and ministered to, by angels. With them and with the whole company of heaven you laud and magnify His glorious Name, the Name of peace, into which you were baptized. Sin is not overcome by the Law, but by the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus has overcome temptation for you and answered for your sins. You are forgiven. You are righteous. You are Holy. Come, then, and eat the Holy Body, drink the Holy Blood, of your Lord and Savior, and be strong not by will or knowledge but be strong in weakness, in dependence upon the mercy and goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.