



SUICIDE
and the
SAVIOR

OCTAVIUS WINSLOW (1808-1878)

SUICIDE AND THE SAVIOR

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SUICIDE AND THE SAVIOR

1. “Cast Thyself Down!”

The second temptation of our Lord was self-destruction. This was its form: “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, *cast thyself down*: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Mat 4:5-6). And still there is no *denial* of His divine sonship on the part of the devil. Alas that there should be on the part of man! He places the fact in a hypothetical point of light only—“*If thou be the Son of God*”—for on a subsequent occasion the unclean demon could exclaim, “I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God” (Mar 1:24).

And yet, there was this fearful temptation of this Holy One. And what was its nature? *Suicide!* “*Cast Yourself down—destroy Yourself!* Presume upon the providence and power of God to preserve You. Commit the act, and leave Him to shield You

from its consequences.” Such, in substance, was the reasoning of this dark archenemy. With what holy horror must the Son of God have recoiled from the temptation to this rash, sinful, appalling crime! And yet with what dignity and power He repels and silences it! “Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Mat 4:7).

There are few temptations by which our race is assailed more common, and none more dire, than this. And, as Satan loves a prominent and shining mark, the victim of his malignity¹ is often placed upon a pinnacle of the temple, that the crime may be the darker, and his triumph the more conspicuous and complete. Therefore it is that God’s saints, Christ’s disciples, are not the exception, but generally the rule, of this appalling onslaught of the foe. How many of the saints of the Most High are, like their Lord and Master, thus assailed by the devil!

My dear reader, it may be that this fiery dart has been hurled at you. Taking advantage of your position, your circumstances, your domestic anxieties, your pressing liabilities, the detractions of enemies, a nervous temperament, mental dejection, a frame tortured by suffering or enfeebled by disease, this may be the form of the temptation by

¹ **malignity** – hateful purpose.

which Satan approaches you. As “there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man” (1Co 10:13), and as both Christ and many of His disciples have been alike assailed as you may now be, it may not be considered out of place or unacceptable if we endeavor to meet your present trial with such words and counsels as the Holy Spirit may suggest and apply.

The temptation that assails you is *self-destruction*. “Cast thyself down.” With whom but with a spirit so inventive of crime, so depraved and malignant, could so unnatural a suggestion, so fearful a sin, originate? Every point of light in which we view it, every reason with which we assail it, every plea by which we dissuade from it—its touching relation to the present, and its more solemn relation to the future—conspire to render the act abhorrent and repelling!

2. Suicide in the Light of Nature

Regard *the sin of suicide* in the light of nature. There is not a stronger or more natural principle of the human mind than *self-preservation*. The love of life and the fear of death are feelings naturally and incontestably implanted in all beings. The irrational creation possess an instinctive principle of the kind engrafted in their nature by God. But it has been left for man to war against a

principle of his nature which all other beings preserve inviolate; and, though endowed with reason, intelligence, conscience, and responsibility, yet, estranged from God, and the subject of a deranged mind, he is often swept on by the force of an irresistible current which lands him at the tribunal² of eternity, the destroyer of a principle the most precious and solemn in the universe!

It is a remarkable fact that in the *primitive state* of society the idea of self-destruction is scarcely known. It is only in nations of extreme civilization and high intelligence that this crime the most greatly prevails. A distinguished French physician remarks that, when a captive in Russia, he once spoke to an intelligent peasant concerning this unnatural deed, and found him totally and blissfully ignorant of its existence. In the rise of the Roman republic it was scarcely known... Thus it would seem that, as society *advanced* in civilization and refinement, not only modes of self-destruction became more refined, but the act itself more familiar. We need scarcely cite the cases of Regulus, Codrus, and Socrates³ as

² **tribunal** – court; judgment seat.

³ **Marcus Atilius Regulus** (3rd century BC) – Roman consul; reported to have faced death in Carthage to keep his word of promise that he would return.

Codrus (11th century BC) – King of Athens; reported to have provoked his own murder by the invading Dorians to fulfil an oracle that the Athenians would be oppressed as long as their king was not harmed.

illustrating what have been termed virtuous and patriotic examples, but which, in no point of light, justify a crime as opposed to the instincts of man as it is condemned by the law of God.

As we are not attempting a treatise on this melancholy subject, we forbear pressing our inquiry into the various motives or causes which may predispose the mind in the commission of so rash an act. Indeed, it would seem impossible to give anything like a proper analysis or classification of them. [Roman emperors] Hadrian and Licinius destroyed themselves from excess of *pain*; [Carthaginian general] Hannibal from excess of *fear*; [Roman governor of Judea] Pontius Pilate from *chagrin* at the spread of Christianity; [Roman emperor] Maximian from *despair* at having oppressed its disciples; Judas [Iscaiot] from *guilt and remorse* at having betrayed its Author. Others have been tempted thus to anticipate their future⁴ from the pressure of *poverty*, from the dread of *exposure*, from *wounded pride*, from *crushed affections*, from *disappointed hopes*, from *hypochondriacism*⁵ assuming a religious form, from

Socrates (5th century BC) – Greek philosopher from Athens; condemned and imprisoned by Athens, Socrates declined escape and drank the poison in compliance with his sentence of death.

⁴ **anticipate their future** – accelerate entry to the future state through taking their own life.

⁵ **hypochondriacism** – acute depression; an unaccountably morbid state of mind.

sheer selfishness, and from a *morbid disgust and weariness of life*. These are some of the predisposing causes to which this wastefulness of life may be traced. But it is with the temptation itself we have now to do.

We assume, however, that in most cases of this kind the melancholy subject of the temptation must be regarded in the light of an irresponsible agent, whose diseased and disordered mind has utterly destroyed the self-controlling power of the soul, and consequently annihilating the only basis upon which human responsibility rests—that is, a sound and healthful *mind*. The majority of suicidal cases must be thus resolved—the alienation of an unbalanced intellect obscuring the light of reason, and destroying the responsibility of the agent. Let nothing, therefore, which may be traced upon this page deepen the shade of sadness which still lingers upon the memory of the past; but let the profoundly mysterious act resolve itself in the righteous permission of the Divine will, quenching in its melancholy subject every vestige of human accountability. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:26), must be the expression of our submission to so dark a mystery of providence.

3. Resist the Temptation with Arguments.

With regard to the temptation, if for a moment it be suggested to your mind, there is every argument drawn from the light of nature with which resistance may be strengthened, and the crime repelled. Let us briefly group them together.

Your life is not your own. “Behold, all souls are mine,” says the Lord (Eze 18:4). The possession of a power over your own life establishes no claim to ownership, any more than the same power over the lives of others invests you with a right to destroy them. God, therefore, in Whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Act 17:28), as your sole Proprietor, alone has authority to dispose of you—demanding or retaining your life, as it pleases Him. “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war” (Ecc 8:8). “None can keep alive his own soul” (Psa 22:29).

What an impeachment,⁶ too, is this act of the wisdom, goodness, and righteousness of God. Deliberately and dispassionately to fling into His face a soul He had created in His own image—endowed with an intelligence second only to His

⁶ **impeachment** – insult.

own, and for whose culture, happiness, and preservation He had provided, in His infinite goodness, so amply—is to insult His majesty, to deny His faithfulness, and virtually to own a disbelief in His very being.

It is an act, too, of extreme selfishness: selfishness utterly indifferent to the claims and feelings of those dependent upon our existence for their own, whose interests we compromise, and upon all the future of whose earthly happiness we cast the dark shadow of grief.

What sad fruit, too, of pride, shame, and cowardice is this act, calmly, premeditatively done! Shrinking from meeting the eye of man, yet not afraid of rushing into the presence of God! Seeking to escape from present embarrassments, afraid to face existing responsibilities, yet not shrinking from the responsibility of a sane suicide, braving the terror of God's tribunal before which the soul thrusts itself uncalled! Oh, it is a fearful temptation of the arch-foe of man, from listening to which for a moment every natural, reasonable, and moral argument and consideration powerfully and solemnly dissuades. Listen to the voice of God, echoed by reason and conscience: "*Do thyself no harm*" (Act 16:28)!

The language of a good man is, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change

come” (Job 14:14). Let revelation and reason unite in winning back your thoughts to solemn reflection and self-restraint, that thus you may be doubly armed against this fearful temptation of Satan.

*Our time is fixed, and all our days are numbered!
How long, how short, we know not: this we know,
Duty requires we calmly wait the summons,
Nor dare to stir till Heaven shall give permission:
Like sentries that must keep their destined stand,
And wait th' appointed hour till they're relieved.
Those only are the brave that keep their ground,
And keep it to the last. To run away
Is but a coward's trick: to run away
From this world's ills, that at the very worst
Will soon blow o'er, thinking to mend ourselves
By boldly venturing on a world unknown,
And plunging headlong in the dark—'tis mad!
No frenzy half so desperate as this.⁷*

4. Resist the Temptation as a Christian.

We have remarked that this is a temptation of Satan from which *God's people* are not totally exempt. A consideration of this will place before us the religious aspect of the subject. The Head of the church thus tempted, the church and the individual members of the church must not expect to be

⁷ *The Grave*, Robert Blair (1699-1746).

absolved. “Cast thyself down,” was the temptation presented to Christ by Satan. “Destroy yourself,” is the like dark thought often suggested by the Evil One to the minds of Christ’s disciples. Seizing upon your peculiar and pressing circumstances, or the physical and mental condition through which you are for the time passing—your tried spirit, or embarrassed position, or bodily suffering, or spiritual gloom and despondency of mind—Satan avails himself of it to present to your mind gloomy thoughts and distrustful feelings of God and His dealings, and to insinuate an easy and effectual mode of escaping from present difficulties and mental distress—the dark, the awful, the appalling one of anticipating the future by your own hand! The idea, the suggestion, the mode of its execution come from him the adversary, the accuser, the foe of God’s saints.

a. Resist

But not for the universe must an instigation so awful in its nature, so dishonoring to your Christian profession, so wounding to Christ, so denying of God, and investing life’s close with a pall of woe so dark, find a moment’s reflective response in your heart or mind. All the powers of your soul, every effort of self-resistance, every tender, holy consideration it is possible for you to

command, must be summoned to the battle and aid you in the victory.

b. Go to Christ

Far beyond this, you must *betake yourself to Christ* the tempted One. You are now tempted by the same tempter as He was Who is prepared to strengthen, aid, and fortify you against, and deliver you out of, this terrible onslaught of His foe and yours. No imagination can portray the tenderness, the compassion, the sympathy of Christ with you in this dark hour of your terrible temptation. All the boundless resources of His grace, power, love, and sympathy are enlisted on your side, and are at your command. How appropriate and precious are the divine declarations of this truth written for you: “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. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15-16). “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour⁸ them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18).

⁸ **succour** – assist.

c. Pray

Oh, *yield yourself in this extremity to prayer*. There is no weapon of resistance like this. With it, you can “resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam 4:7). Meet the arch-foe with the name of Jesus, and he will quail⁹ before you. Uplift in faith the cross of Christ, and you will put to flight all the hosts of hell.

Take your temptation, drag the tempter to the throne of grace, and you are safe. The shadow of that spot is too divine, too pure and holy, for a temptation to live a single moment. There the Wicked One will cease to trouble you, there your weary soul will sweetly rest. Communion with God, the opening of your heart to Christ, flying into the very bosom of the Comforter, will put to flight all the hosts of hell. Oh, betake yourself, tempted child of God, to prayer! God invites you, the blood of Jesus gives you access, and the mercy-seat will cover you with its divine and sacred shadow, beneath which God will keep you in perfect peace. “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of

⁹ **quail** – draw back, as with fear.

man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues” (Psa 31:19-20)

d. Trust Christ’s victory

Christ has wounded, despoiled, and vanquished Satan on the cross and in the grave; and a yet more signal and final triumph over him awaits the Son of God—and you have but to *shelter your tried, tempted, trembling soul beneath His overshadowing wing* until this dark hour of temptation is past. Oh, what a soothing reflection is this: “The Son of God, my Savior, was tempted to self-destruction, even as I am! Then, will He desert me in this hour of my weakness? Will He leave me to combat the tempter alone? Will He not assist me by His grace, aid me with His strength, comfort me with His love, soothe me with His sympathy, and deliver me by His great power? Most assuredly He will! He has trodden this very path Himself. He has been assailed by this very foe, and with this very temptation; and will He not support me as no other being does, as no other being can? O sweet assault that opens to me the gentle heart of Jesus, into which I run, and am shielded by its power, soothed by its sympathy, and am lost in its love. Then, I will look to Jesus, cling to Jesus, trust in Jesus, Who knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and Who will deliver *me!*” ...

*Our great adversary and accuser is a defeated foe.*¹⁰ From this onslaught upon Christ he retired foiled, vanquished, and abashed. The Seed of the woman had bruised the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). It is true, Satan left Him for a season (Luk 4:13), to renew the battle on another and a more conspicuous field, and at a future and a more eventful time; but only to be more signally discomfited, more fatally wounded, and more completely overthrown.¹¹ Tempted believer in Jesus! Learn thus the paralyzed power of your tempter, that you do not be disheartened and dismayed. Remember that the Son of God has foiled him, that the Captain of your salvation has pierced him, signally and fatally; and that every fiery dart winged at your soul is plucked from a quiver all whose weapons, pointed at the believer, are tipped with the conquering blood of Christ, and are hurled by the stricken arm of an archer humbled and cowed¹² by the consciousness of a signal and irrecoverable defeat!

e. Know you are not alone

Do not think...that some strange thing has happened unto you—that you tread a peculiar,

¹⁰ The material from this point to the end of the booklet was originally separated from the preceding text by several paragraphs.

¹¹ In our Savior's work of redemption: death, burial, and resurrection.

¹² **cowed** – conquered.

solitary path, a path untrodden by the saints of God. O no! You are one of the “great cloud of witnesses” of whom it is recorded, “they were tempted” (Heb 12:1), and with them you shall testify to the power of faith in giving you the victory over all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

f. Go to the Scriptures

Fly, tempted one, to the precious Scriptures! They are your grand arsenal, richly stored with every kind of weapon with which to foil and vanquish your powerful, sleepless, subtle foe. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa 119:11). Above all, fly to the Christ of the Scriptures, and nestle your tempted spirit beneath His sheltering wing...

5. A Word to the Unconverted

Only slight mention has been made in this [booklet] to *the awful condition of the unconverted*, still under the dominion and power of Satan, led captive by him at his will. We would not close without a solemn word addressed especially to such. My dear reader, be your standard of morality, your religious creed, your education, your rank in society what it may, nothing modifies, softens, or alters, in the slightest degree, the

appalling fact that an unrenewed, unregenerate soul is a soul yet the subject of Satan—the captive and slave of his power and service.

What is the unerring testimony of God's Word? Addressing those who, through grace, were rescued from the power of Satan, the apostle thus speaks, “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:1-2). What an appalling description of the unrenewed! Reader, it is a faithful portrait of you, if you are yet not born again of the Spirit. What need have we of further testimony? Surely this one passage, were there no other proof, is sufficient to fill with awe and alarm every unconverted reader of this page. The strong man armed, who is the devil, has still the full possession of your soul; and will remain in undisturbed, undisputed, and willing occupation, until a stronger than he enters, spoils him of his goods, and casts him out. Satan, “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2Co 4:4). It is his aim and policy to keep your soul in carnal security, in false peace, in the stillness and insensibility of spiritual death.

Mistake not your real condition! Mistake not cold ritualism for vital religion; dead formalism for spiritual life; carnal insensibility for Divine peace; rash confidence for humble faith; human excitement for holy love; groundless expectation for assured hope! Satan is a great counterfeiter! He not only can quote Scripture, but he can imitate grace. Every kind of false religion, and every form of spurious Christianity, are his inventions. He will strive to retain possession of your soul, nor relinquish his hold, without a long and a desperate struggle.

Be assured of this, that *everything that is evil and false is of Satan*. Every atheistic idea of God, every infidel thought of the Bible, every suggestion of sin, every prompting to evil, every new attraction of the world, every impediment in the way of your salvation, every argument and persuasive pleading for a postponement to a more convenient season (it may be to a sick and dying bed) of the great, the needful work of repentance and of faith, the solemn, the momentous preparation of the soul for eternity—all, all is of Satan.

In all this you are “*taken captive by him at his will*” (2Ti 2:26). Oh, solemn, appalling thought: “My soul the palace of Satan! My intellect, my will, my heart all under his influence and at his

command! My present and my future life not God's, not Christ's, not heaven's, but Satan's!"

Oh, *throw yourself at the feet of the Savior*, Whose mission it is to destroy the works of the devil, and the devil himself, and beseech Him to rend the chain, to eject the usurper, and to claim and possess the throne and the kingdom of your soul as His own forever! Hell shall not then be your everlasting abode, nor Satan your eternal tormentor. But He Who came into this world "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isa 61:1), will claim you as His lawful prize, and when you die, heaven will be your home and God your Father! You shall live and reign with Christ forever and ever. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1Pe 5:8-9).

And then comes the final defeat and eternal doom of him who so long and so fearfully reigned and ruled, the god and despot of mankind. "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev 20:10).

