

# *Spiritual Self Defense*

The Biblical Strategy for Overcoming Temptation

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**Part One:**

# **Know The Adversary**

## 1

**THE ADVERSARY'S EXISTENCE**

Shortly after we were married, my wife and I moved five hundred miles south, to the state of Tennessee. Soon after getting settled, we planted a vegetable garden. Since I had often helped in the garden as a youngster, I was confident that our first attempt at gardening would be successful. Everything went well until one morning when I went out to survey the garden. Nearly every one of our newly planted tomato plants had been cut off at ground level. It looked like somebody had deliberately cut them off with a knife. We had no idea what had happened.

When I consulted the elderly man that lived next door about our misfortune, he said, “Oh, that’s cutworms.” Being new to that area, we had never heard of cutworms, but our neighbor told us what to do. He instructed us to tie a twig from a nearby tree to the stalk of each new plant that we set out. He explained that a cutworm had to wrap itself completely around the stalk of a plant in order to cut it off, but that it could not reach completely around both the stalk and the twig attached to it. Only after following his advice, was the problem solved.

If we had known about cutworms and how to stop them from cutting our plants, we would have taken the necessary measures beforehand to prevent the destruction. However, we were completely unaware of the enemy. We are always more vulnerable when we are unaware of an enemy’s presence. The Apostle Peter had learned well this truth, for he had been sifted by the devil—as the Scriptures tell us (Luke 22:31)—and had succumbed to the enemy’s temptation. It is no wonder that he wrote so passionately about this same enemy in his first letter.

**Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (1 Peter 5:8-9)**

In the verse that precedes the above two verses (1 Pet. 5:7) Peter tells us to cast all of our anxiety upon the Lord—depending entirely on him. But, so that there would be no misconceptions, he shifts gears in verse eight and reminds us that while we must depend on God, we still have responsibilities. The Christian life is not passive. Not only do we have responsibilities, but we also have an enemy—the Devil—who would divert us from those responsibilities. Therefore, every believer must be able to effectively deal with this common enemy.

In this modern-day world, it seems that most people consider it passé to believe in the existence of the devil. According to the Barna Research Group, sixty percent of adult Americans believe that the devil is simply a symbol of evil.<sup>1</sup> Sixty percent doesn’t seem that alarming, considering the number of non-believing people in our nation. However, consider this alarming statistic: Barna also found that among those who profess to be born-again Christians, forty-three percent said that the devil is not real, but is simply a symbol of evil. If, indeed, we are more

vulnerable when we are unaware of an enemy's presence, then it is no wonder that the devil seeks to camouflage his existence, and it seems that he has done a good job.

Going a step farther, I wonder how many of those that take the devil's existence seriously also acknowledge his activity. In other words, how serious are we about the spiritual battle with which they are confronted? Years ago A. W. Tozer said, "That this world is a playground instead of a battleground has now been accepted in practice by the vast majority of . . . Christians."<sup>2</sup> Is this not the case, even more so, today? We desire a playground and try to make life into one. But, the reality of life is far different. Life is a battleground.

Our enemy, Satan, rebelled against God in eternity past, tempted Adam and Eve, attempted to defeat Job, tried to persuade Jesus Christ to sin, induced Peter to deny the Lord, and inspired Judas to betray him. Repeatedly, the Bible confirms the reality of Satan and the danger that he poses to every believer in Jesus Christ. We have a very real opponent. It is essential to our spiritual health that we recognize his opposition, and that we be engaged in the spiritual battle. Satan—the devil—stands opposed to everything that we believe. He will most certainly attempt to defeat us spiritually and rob us of our joy and our testimony. We must take the threat seriously. We must meet it. This is the solemn warning that Peter gives to us in First Peter 5:8-9. As Christians, we have an enemy with whom we must reckon.

The fact that we have an enemy and face his continual opposition confronts us with some sobering realizations that Peter addresses. First, we need to realize that we are in danger.

## **WE ARE IN DANGER**

By nature, the Devil is a dangerous, wicked and cruel adversary. In this regard, Peter compares him to a hungry lion that is intent on killing his prey and devouring its flesh. The Devil harbors nothing but ill will toward Christians. He will devour every one of us that he can. Peter uses two descriptive terms and an illustration from the animal kingdom to characterize the danger we face.

### **An Adversary**

Notice that Peter calls the devil "your enemy" (v. 8). The word "enemy" was used in ancient times to refer to an opponent in a lawsuit. He was the one who held the opposing position. Similarly, the Devil is our adversary. He opposes all that is good, all that is right. He opposes God and all that follow God. He is the spiritual adversary of every believer. As Adrian Rodgers has said, "If you're sinking in quicksand, Satan will gladly come along and pat you on the head."

### **A Deceiver**

Notice also that he is slanderous in his methodology. Peter indicates this when he uses the term "devil" (v. 8). The word "devil" means "slanderer." The Hebrew name "Satan" carries the same basic meaning. The devil is clearly a slanderer. He is deceitful, and he is a liar. Jesus called him the father of lies (John 8:44). His slanderous nature has been evident from the very

beginning. In Genesis 3:4 he contradicted the warning God gave to Adam concerning the forbidden fruit, saying to Eve, “You will not surely die.” He delights in twisting the truth. Given the opportunity, he will slander God’s Word and deceive men. This is how he manipulates people into doing what otherwise they would not do.

Perhaps you have known someone who seemed to love the Lord, but one day did something that was diametrically opposed to all that they professed. As you observed the situation, perhaps you wondered, “Why did he do that?” Or maybe, “How did that happen?” Maybe you have experienced something similar in your own life. Probably at one time or another, you have said to yourself, “Why did I do that?” or “How could I have said that?” Is it not because we listened to the deceitful lies of Satan? He slandered God’s Word and we listened. He told us God was being unfair with us and we listened. He provided us with an excuse as to why it was all right in our situation to do what we did. He told us it was all right to bend the rules a little bit. The mouthpieces he uses are many, but he is the mastermind behind every justification. By the time we commit a sin, we have become convinced, if only for a moment, that it is justified.

### **A Malicious Foe**

Behind all of Satan’s slanderous accusations is a malicious intent. A malicious person causes deliberate harm. Satan is out to deliberately harm believers. We see this in the comparison Peter uses. He says that our enemy, “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (v. 8).

Many commentators and Bible students have taken Peter’s comparison to a “roaring lion” in the wrong way, thinking of the lions used in the arena. During times of persecution the Romans put Christians in the arena and let lions kill them for the entertainment of the crowd. And so, it is assumed that satanically inspired persecution is pictured in this verse. It is also assumed that since the book of First Peter has much to say about suffering, that suffering must be in view here. No doubt, times of persecution and suffering are satanically inspired. They can even be characterized as times when Satan roared, but that is not what is meant here.

Peter’s meaning becomes clear when we understand the nature of lions. A lion’s roar is one way that he marks his territory. The dominant male lion in a pride roars to warn other male lions to stay out of his territory, and his roar can be heard up to nine miles away. Keeping in mind that lions were native to the Middle East in those days, we can assume that Peter’s original readers were familiar with a lion’s roar and what it meant. They would have often heard a roaring lion and would have understood that a roaring lion was a dominant lion—the most powerful lion in the area. It is of note to remember that Satan, a fallen angel, was not alone in the fall. Many other angels fell with him, but he was the instigator of the rebellion, the leader. So, this was Peter’s way of saying that he was talking about “the” devil, Satan, “the” roaring lion, our most powerful foe.

Peter further describes the roaring lion as one that is prowling around. A lion that is prowling around is stalking his prey. Lions typically sleep and rest nineteen to twenty hours every day and will spend four to five hours hunting for food. A lion kills, eats, sleeps, and then

repeats the process. Lions are at the top of the food chain. They have no natural enemies. Male lions weigh up to five hundred pounds, stand four feet high at the shoulder, and stretch nine feet from nose to tail. They are powerful enough to pounce on full-grown water buffaloes and zebras, pull them to the ground, and quickly kill them.

Lions are killing machines. They live to eat, consuming up to seventy-five pounds of meat at a time. And when Peter says the devil is like a roaring lion that prowls around stalking his prey he is painting the fiercest picture possible of the enemy that we face, and that enemy is bent on our destruction. He prowls around, “looking for someone to devour” (v. 8). The Greek word translated “devour” means “to drink down.” The picture is a gruesome one, but if you have ever seen lions caught on film eating their catch, you know what it looks like. The feeding lions are covered with the blood of the animal they are consuming as if they had been drinking its blood and spilled it all over themselves. Now, this is the image we have here of our enemy. He is as eager to destroy men’s lives spiritually, as a lion is to devour the flesh of its prey. He is a malicious destroyer.

Understanding the danger that faces us is imperative. We have to take our enemy seriously or we will become easy prey. We must acknowledge his adversarial stance, his slanderous methodology, and his malicious intent if we hope to defend ourselves from his attacks.

### **WE NEED TO DEFEND OURSELVES**

The second realization flows from the first, and it is obvious. We need to effectively defend ourselves against this dangerous foe. So, Peter sets forth the basics of spiritual self-defense in three admonitions.

#### **Avoid Distraction**

In the original the word translated “self-controlled” (v. 8) means to be sober, the opposite of being inebriated. Peter is using a figure of speech. By telling his readers to be sober, he means that they should not be intoxicated with worldly pursuits—distracted and preoccupied to the point of being unaware of an enemy. It is all too easy to be focused on the practical necessities of daily life to the point of spiritual distraction, like a grazing antelope that is so focused on his next morsel that he is unaware of an approaching lion.

#### **Be Alert**

Peter goes on to say that we also need to be “alert” (v. 8). It is not so much physical, as spiritual alertness that is in view. Being spiritually alert begins with an active prayer life. Jesus taught his disciples to pray about the matter of temptation, saying, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Mt. 6:13). When he admonished Peter, James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion—the night Peter denied him and the others forsook him—he said, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Mt. 26:41). Therefore, being alert requires anticipating temptation and making it a matter of prayer.

In addition to prayer, believers must be ever watchful over their lives. The only real defense that the prey of a lion has is its own watchfulness. Almost everything that a lion kills can outrun him over a long distance. So, the lion's method of catching its prey is to silently stalk its victim. Lions hunt at night. Their eyes are suited for seeing in the dark. Much like a house cat stalks a mouse or a bird, crouched low and moving in slow motion, a lion creeps through the tall grass in the darkness to within fifty feet or so of the intended victim. Then, with a burst of speed reaching thirty-five miles per hour and ending with a final pounce of up to thirty-five feet, a lion quickly captures its prey before the victim can accelerate to full speed and escape. By the time, a lion reveals himself to his prey it is too late. The only defense that an antelope or a zebra has against such tactics is to be alert enough to catch a glimpse of the lion before he attacks. The same is true in our struggle against the devil. Our defense also depends upon being alert. Now we cannot see Satan because he is a spiritual being, but we can certainly identify temptation when it occurs. Therefore, watchfulness must be geared to the situation or the circumstances at hand. If we know that certain situations often lead to temptation in our life, then we need to avoid those situations. If there is a place where we are often tempted, then we need to stay away from that place. If there are certain people that cause us temptation, then we need to separate ourselves from those people. Practically speaking, this is how to be watchful.

### **Take a Stand**

In addition to being self-controlled and alert, there is another requirement for effective self-defense. In regard to the enemy, Peter says, that we need to be, "standing firm in the faith" (v. 9). James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7). Paul makes a similar statement, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:11).

The Scriptures are clear. It is up to us to take a stand against the enemy, in order to withstand Satan's temptations. How is this done? Peter does not leave us guessing. He says that we must resist by standing firm in the faith. The word translated "standing firm" means "rock-solid" like the foundation of a building that is unmovable. In other words, believers need to be on firm ground. God's truth is that firm footing. Notice also that our firm resistance should be "in the faith." We resist not with our faith, but "in the faith"—that is, by means of the Word of God. Remember, the devil is a deceiver, a liar, and a slanderer. He tempts us by causing us to doubt the Word of God. He attempts to twist things around so that truth and error become confused. When he is successful, he is able to induce God's people to do what is contrary to God's will.

The simple fact is that we resist the devil by dedicating ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people are far too concerned about the devil. They are always talking about him—about what he is doing and about how he is tempting them. The fact is we do not need to focus on the Devil in our daily lives. In fact, for all practical purposes, we do not know for sure what the devil does or does not do. Every one of us contends with multiple enemies, including our own lustful desires and the pressures of the world in which we live. Temptations can occur without Satan's involvement. On the other hand, Satan is a master at camouflaging his activity and it might be surprising how much he or his emissaries have to do with the temptations we face. However, we do not know for sure when he is involved or not. In fact, it is not necessary to

pinpoint direct satanic influence. What is important is to recognize temptation when it occurs and deal with it. If we concentrate on being a dedicated Christian, one that battles against temptation, one that seeks to live in accord with God's Word, we are, most certainly, directly or indirectly, resisting the Devil.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Apostle's message in 1 Peter 5:8-9 is simply this: We have an enemy. The first step in reckoning with him is to realize that we are in danger. The second step is to implement an effective defense. We simply must not be caught with our spiritual defenses down, unaware and unprepared.

## 2

## THE ADVERSARY'S OBJECTIVE

On September 23, 2002, Roberto Campos kidnapped his former girl friend, Lourdes Gusman, and her two children, ages four and seven, from their Raleigh, North Carolina residence. Witnesses told police that he was holding a gun to Gusman's head as they drove away. A short while later Campos stopped and put the children out of the vehicle. Continuing on with his former girl friend, a police chase ensued. Police cars and a state highway patrol helicopter followed him north always at a distance out of concern for the hostage. During a three-hour chase across several counties and into Virginia, Campos fired his gun at the police and at other motorists. Finally, Virginia state troopers employed "stop-sticks" to puncture his tires and force him to stop whereupon he shot and killed Gusman and then himself.<sup>3</sup>

This story is not unique. Similar tragic events unfold almost on a daily basis. Different individuals are involved and the details vary, but the behavior pattern displayed is usually the same. As tragic as these stories are, they are also instructive, because they help us understand Satan's behavior and his motivation for tempting believers in Jesus Christ. When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we become part of the church, the bride of Christ, and Satan cannot do anything to change this fact. Salvation is a permanent gift, and all true saints persevere. Although he was once our father (John 8:44), he cannot have us back once we accept Christ – we belong to another. And, so, he behaves, as did Roberto Campos. If he can, he will take us captive, not physically, but spiritually by inducing us to sin. He wants us to disobey God, because he still desires for us to do his bidding as we once did. Even if it is only for a moment, he desires for us to serve him rather than God. Why? It is because he is first of all and foremost God's rival and we are but pawns to be sacrificed in his match with God. He doesn't care about us any more than Roberto Campos cared about his former girl friend. We call crimes like that committed by Campos, "crimes of passion," but in reality they are not crimes of passion at all. Instead, they are irrational attempts to control another person. Likewise, Satan will lead us into sin hoping to frustrate God by usurping his authority over us. He doesn't even mind, if sinful choices lead to our destruction. If so, at least, we would never again serve God in this life. He is indeed a roaring lion that would willingly devour us (1 Pet. 3:8). If he cannot have us, then neither will God. This is his mindset and we are his targets. Why he behaves this way can be traced back to his original sin of pride. He wanted to be like God, and he still does. He desires to exercise all the prerogatives of deity over the created universe.

Isaiah describes Satan's initial sin and his subsequent fall in the fourteenth chapter of his prophecy.

**How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred**

**mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”(Isa. 14:12-14)**

Satan’s original sinful desires were reproduced in the Babylonian King that Isaiah describes in this passage. So, in verses twelve through fourteen, Isaiah, in the midst of his discussion of this king, pulls back the curtain on the past and reveals the source of such behavior—Satan’s original sin. What Isaiah reveals about him explains why he torments believers today. Nothing has changed. His ultimate objective remains the same. He wants to be like God and consequently to control all, including us. His temptations are attempts to manipulate us, to subjugate us, and to use us for his own ends. If we are to take the threat he poses seriously, we must understand his ultimate objective. Knowing what he wants facilitates increased alertness, and results in more effective resistance. He wants to be like God. As Isaiah tells us, this ultimate objective manifests itself in two compelling desires.

### **PREDOMINANCE**

First, Satan desires to be predominant—to stand on the top rung of the ladder and be second to none. Before his fall into sin, he was an angel of high rank. Isaiah refers to him as “the morning star,” and as “the son of the dawn” (v. 12). Evidently he possessed great glory prior to his fall. Ezekiel says he was “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezk. 28:12) and that he was “anointed as a guardian cherub” (Ezk. 28:14). Perhaps he was second only to God among all other created beings. Without a doubt, his status was initially great, but he wasn’t satisfied.

#### **Having Divine Status**

Satan’s desire for predominance required elevating himself to divine status. There are three expressions of his desire to ascend unto God’s status in verses thirteen and fourteen. First, he said in his heart, “I will ascend to heaven” (v. 13). In all probability he didn’t abide in heaven with God, but only served there. Isaiah previously described him as “fallen from heaven” and “cast down to the earth” (v. 12). Ezekiel adds that he was, “driven in disgrace from the mount of God” (Ezk. 28:16). His sin resulted in the loss of the privilege he had, serving in the presence of God. Isaiah records two other expressions of his desire for an elevated status, “I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain” (v. 13), and, “I will ascend above the tops of the clouds” (v. 14). Since the common Jewish metaphoric description of heaven placed God’s abode high in the northern mountains above the clouds, it is clear that a desire for divine status is indicated. This sinful desire cost him dearly. The only access to heaven that he is granted from this point forward is occasional, to accuse believers when they sin (Rev. 12:10).

#### **Being Worshipped**

Satan’s desire for predominant status finds its ultimate expression in the desire to be worshipped. When he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he offered him all the kingdoms of the world, if he would bow down and worship him (Matt. 4:8-9). The Antichrist who will be empowered by Satan and do his bidding during the tribulation period will both claim divine status and require the worship of men (2 Th. 2:4). In a sense, every temptation that Satan

orchestrates is a twisted attempt to gain the allegiance of men. The addictions, sinful habits, and lustful practices of men are idols that they serve above everything else. Satan certainly takes pleasure in promoting the worship of such idols because those who worship idols are actually worshipping demons of whom he is chief (1 Cor. 10:19-21). In this way, the world actually worships Satan, the head demon. And when Christians succumb to his temptations, it is the closest he can come to having their worship.

## **DOMINION**

In his desire to be like God, Satan not only desires the status of God, but he also desires the authority that God possesses. He wants to be obeyed as a sovereign. This desire for dominion has two aspects.

### **Self Determination**

Satan desires to rule the universe by the exercise of his own will. Isaiah records five expressions of his self-will that led to his fall.

**I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. (Isa. 14:13-14)**

These expressions all employ first person verbs noted by the personal pronoun “I” in our English translation. These prideful assertions demonstrate his unwillingness to take a back seat, even to God, and are summed up in the final expression; “I will make myself like the Most High” (v. 14).

### **Universal Authority**

His desire for power over others has no limits. He said, “I will raise my throne above the stars of God” (v. 13). The word “throne” obviously conveys the idea of sovereignty or rule. The word “stars” probably refers to the other angels as they do in Job (Job 38:7). These angels would have been the only other living beings over whom he could rule at the time of his fall in eternity past. Also, the expression, “I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly” (v. 13), contains the idea of sitting on a throne and exercising absolute authority. Satan desired to rule God’s created universe from the beginning and this desire was nothing short of outright rebellion against God.

What Satan desired from the beginning was obtained to a degree through the fall of man. God had given Adam rule over all the earth and when he sinned, he yielded to Satan’s will, voluntarily subjecting himself to Satan’s authority. Thus, Satan became the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). Scripture also calls him “the prince of this world” (John 14:30), “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:2), and the one who “leads the whole world astray” (Rev. 12:9). The scope of his influence is also apparent in the temptation of Christ. He offered Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world” in exchange for his worship (Matt. 4:8). The world system, the way things operate in this world, is clearly under his influence.

Various individuals under his influence have displayed an insatiable desire for power down through the centuries. The list would include the Babylonian king that Isaiah wrote about here in chapter fourteen, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler and many others. All of these and others have exhibited the very same desires Isaiah attributed to Satan in connection with his fall.

Satan's power over unbelievers extends to the blinding of their minds to the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Obviously, when one of his previously blind subjects is convinced of the truth of the gospel by power of the Spirit, he is not happy. As previously stated, he cannot rob a truly born-again believer of salvation, but he will do what he can to make that believer's life miserable. His temptations are twisted attempts at regaining control over that person's life. If a sin is committed, he gladly accuses that person before God pointing out their hypocrisy and disloyalty to God while advertising his own influence over them (Rev. 12:10). He has no concern over those whose lives he adversely affects. Like a jealous boyfriend, he would rather see them destroyed by sin than give up his influence over them.

### **CONCLUSION**

Everything that Satan does flows from his ultimate objective, being like God. This is clear from his two compelling desires. He desires both a predominant position and ultimate power over God's creation. We give him a measure of what he desires when we yield to temptation. In exchange we receive nothing of lasting value. Sin will bring only guilt and potentially the correction of God. Understanding Satan's objective and what yielding to temptation involves should motivate us to resist Satan with newfound determination.

## 3

## THE ADVERSARY'S TACTICS

To be savvy consumers, we need to be aware of the methods that advertisers use in order to convince us to buy their products. Otherwise, we will find ourselves at their mercy. Take the infomercial for instance. A good infomercial has four recognizable components. First, it is longer than a normal commercial. Its protracted sales pitch tends to wear down our resistance. Second, there is either a celebrity or an expert endorsement. These influential personalities lend credibility to the product. Third, an easy installment method of payment is offered. The three easy payments are an attractive feature until you do the math and find that the price is not so appealing. Finally, there is a money-back guarantee of some sort. All these factors combine to break down the buyer's resistance. I know because I was once fleeced by an infomercial.

I was traveling late at night and the only clear station I could get on the radio was airing an infomercial. At first, I thought, "This can't be legitimate." But, after listening to the continuing sales pitch, I was convinced. Several medical doctors were endorsing a product that they claimed would help a person lose weight, among other things. So, I ordered the product, but the only weight I lost came out of my wallet.

Admittedly, not all infomercials are scams, but it's doubtful I'll ever bite on another one. In fact, I refuse to listen to them anymore. Why? Because I know what they are when I hear them, and I know they represent a potential rip-off. They are recognizable by the methods they use to sell their products. As an informed consumer, I'm alert to the methods used and refuse to be taken in again.

Now, what is true in the commercial world is applicable to the spiritual realm. Satan, our enemy, seeks to destroy our lives by inducing us to sin. In doing so, he uses certain recognizable methods of temptation. Paul refers to these methods in Ephesians 6:11 as "the devil's schemes" and says that we need to defend ourselves against them. If we are not aware of Satan's tactics, defensive measures are useless. This is why Peter tells us to be "self-controlled" and "alert" (1 Peter 5:8). We need to be aware of the enemy's approach. Obviously, we cannot see him because he's a spiritual being, but we can become aware of his methods and alert to his tactics. What are his methods of temptation? They are implicit in the biblical account of the first temptation (Gen. 3:1-6).

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,**

**knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Gen. 3:1-6)**

His methods have not changed. Satan still utilizes the same methods of temptation today. There are three that are evident.

### **SUBTLETY**

The first method that Satan utilizes is subtlety. Anything that is subtle is difficult to detect, elusive, or not immediately obvious. Three examples of his subtlety can also be identified in Genesis 3:1-6.

Satan always attempts to disguise his involvement in temptation. If it is obvious that a particular temptation is the work of Satan, we are not as likely to yield to it. If, on the other hand, Satan’s temptations come from some other source, it is more likely to catch us off guard. Notice the intermediaries that Satan used. First, he used the serpent to tempt Eve (vs. 1-3). Then he used Eve to tempt Adam (v. 6).

#### **Slick Talk**

Slick talk is one tool that Satan uses to twist arms. We are all familiar with the slick talking pitchmen who appear on television commercials. They have a way of making the product they are selling sound irresistible. The world is also full of slick talkers who pitch the benefits of sinful behavior. They make sin seem desirable. They are, whether they realize it or not, puppets of Satan. In the beginning, there were no such men Satan could utilize in approaching Eve, so he used an animal. Satan, the subtle tempter, chose the subtlest of animals, the serpent, to approach Eve.

Some find this account incredible, but it is altogether plausible given the fact that parrots, myna birds, and parakeets can be trained to mimic human speech. Although serpents do not possess this capability today, they may have prior to the fall. If so, the serpent’s words would not have aroused as much suspicion as would have any direct communication from Satan. The curse on the serpent mentioned in Genesis 3:14 certainly brought about some very pronounced changes in the serpent, all of which may not have been enumerated. It could be that snakes were deprived of their ability to mimic human speech after the fall. If this explanation is accurate, all Satan had to do was manipulate the snake in order to speak to Eve. It also may be that Satan entered into the serpent. Jesus once allowed a group of demons to enter into a herd of pigs (Luke 8:33). Whether it happened this way or not, it is obvious that Satan was speaking through the serpent. It certainly could have been a simple exception to nature, allowed by God in this instance, as was the case with Balaam’s donkey (Num. 22:28). At any rate, it is interesting that the temptation came by way of an animal, over which man had been given authority. There was no excuse for Eve to have listened to the serpent, but she did (Gen. 1:28). Perhaps she was blissfully unaware of any threat posed by the serpent and thoughtlessly exposed herself to his influence. All the while, Satan, in accord with his subtlety, remained anonymous to her. He still employs the same

methods today although he no longer needs to utilize a serpent. Instead, he routinely induces one person to mouth his temptations to another while he remains unrecognized as the source of the temptation.

His slick talk aimed to plant a seed of doubt in the mind of Eve. He questioned, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Notice that he expanded the actual prohibition to include all the fruit found in the garden. At the same time he must have spoken with an air of incredulity. In other words, he said, “Did God really say that? Is that what he really meant?” By this subtle means, Satan suggested that God was unfair and overly restrictive and Eve began to doubt the goodness of God. This is clear from her response. She answers correctly that God had indeed forbidden them from eating the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, but then she adds to God’s prohibition, “and you must not touch it, or you will die.” Her own addition to God’s command shows the effect of Satan’s suggestion. She had begun to see God as overly restrictive and unnecessarily harsh. By this subtlety Satan set her up for the temptation that was to come.

### **Familiar Friends**

Another subtle source of temptation comes from our friends. Satan first employed the serpent as an intermediary to tempt Eve; then he used Eve as his mouthpiece to tempt Adam. We do not often think of our friends as sources of temptation, but undoubtedly they can be. Eve gave the forbidden fruit to Adam. She was his closest friend, his only friend except God. There is no indication that the serpent was directly involved in Adam’s temptation. Eve was the source of his temptation. How subtle this approach was. It is natural to assume that our friends will not steer us wrong.

Matthew 16:21-23 provides us with another example of this subtle approach. Jesus foretold his death in verse 21. Upon hearing this, Peter began to rebuke the Lord in verse 22, saying, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” In refusing to accept the will of God and proposing a different course, Peter became a source of temptation to Jesus. Jesus responded in verse twenty-three by saying, “Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Whether Jesus meant that Satan was directly using Peter as an intermediary in the temptation or that Peter was at that moment a slanderer of God’s Word, like Satan, is not clear. Either way, Peter, a close friend and disciple, was at that moment a source of temptation.

Peer pressure, such as our friends often bring to bear on us, can be a powerful influence in our lives. The following account from Dr. James Dobson’s book, Hide or Seek illustrates the power of peer pressure to influence behavior.

I knew a blind fifteen-year-old girl who refused to admit she had a handicap. She would not accept the help of a special teacher provided by the school. And her parents could not even get her to use a white cane. To thump along the corridor of the school marked her as different from her peers and she couldn’t tolerate that distinction. I watched one day as she walked to her next class with her head erect as though she knew where she was going. Before I could stop her, she walked straight

into a post. Even this experience was insufficient to make her use a device which other teenagers did not need.<sup>4</sup>

Satan will gladly use such powerful tools of influence as our friends and associates in order to tempt us.

### **Pressurized Circumstances**

Another source of temptation that Satan uses against us is pressurized circumstances. Consider Adam's dilemma. According to 1 Timothy 2:14, Eve was deceived, but he was not. He knew that eating the forbidden fruit would result in death. So, why did he eat? Evidently, he chose to join her rather than lose her. She had met a very real need in his life, and he could not face losing her. Satan and his temptations often revolve around such choices. There is often a cost associated with doing what God requires. Part of that cost is not being able to freely and completely fellowship with those who are doing otherwise. The loss of a friend or friends is painful. Satan loves to maneuver us into a situation that requires a choice between God and someone or something else that is dear to us. His subtle manipulations can produce extreme pressure on us to choose the wrong course.

## **DECEPTION**

In addition to subtlety, Satan uses deception as a method of temptation. Deception is a ruse, a trick, or anything that is meant to mislead. The Scriptures tell us that Eve was deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). Genesis 3:4-5 records that deception.

### **The Denial of Truth**

Having already cast doubt on God's motives, Satan proceeded to blatantly deny the truth, saying that death would not result from eating the forbidden fruit. It is but a short distance between doubt and denial. Once doubt about any aspect of God's truth enters a person's mind, the denial of that truth is just one short step away. The denial articulated by Satan becomes a reality in our lives when we chose to sin.

Satan is a liar, and he has been one since the beginning (John 8:44). He is, forever, attempting to make right appear to be wrong and what is wrong appear to be right. In a sense, he switches road signs on us, much like the Germans did in World War II to confuse the invading allies. We must not fall for his tricks. In a world where error constantly masquerades as truth, it is up to us to be thoroughly familiar with God's Word so that we are able to ascertain the difference between truth and error.

### **The Justification of Sin**

A second means of deception that Satan uses is the justification of sin. After denying that sin would bring death, he added to the deception by telling Eve that eating the forbidden fruit would actually be of benefit. Temptation always involves the denial of sin's harmful effects while at the same time promising that there is something good to be gained. In this case Satan

promised greater knowledge (opened eyes) and a higher plane of existence (that they would be like God). Half-truths are whole lies. An increased knowledge of evil did result from the experience of it, but sin did not elevate Adam and Eve to God's status. Instead, it cost them dearly just as God had said that it would.

Satan, the master of deceit, often appears to be an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). He makes sin seem beneficial. When people yield to temptation, it is because they have been convinced that something desirable will be the result. It is an empty promise. Even worse, it is a costly mistake.

Paul Harvey's classic description of how an Eskimo kills a wolf illustrates the deceptive and deadly methodology of Satan. The blade of a razor-sharp knife is coated with a layer of blood and allowed to freeze. Other layers are applied over the first. Then the handle of the knife is embedded in ice with the blade pointing upward. When an unsuspecting wolf happens along, he begins to lick the knife blade, which is at first obscured by the frozen blood. In time the wolf slices his own tongue and begins to consume his own blood in the process. Eventually, the satisfaction of his blood-thirst results in death.<sup>5</sup>

## **ENTICEMENT**

The third method of temptation that Satan utilizes is enticement. To entice means to attract by arousing desire. Satan's enticement of Eve is evident in verses five and six.

### **The Use of Bait**

Satan, like any good fisherman, knows how to bait his hook. In the garden the bait was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, forbidden by God but dressed up as something desirable by the subtlety of Satan. God said that eating the fruit of the tree would bring death (Gen. 2:17). Satan denied this fact (Gen. 3:4) and convinced Eve that consuming it would actually be beneficial to her, making her like God (v. 5). This was the ultimate bait—that one could become Godlike.

### **The Appeal to Desire**

The bait appealed to Eve's desires in three ways. First, it appealed to her appetite. She perceived the forbidden fruit to be something that would be pleasurable to eat. Second, being pleasing to her eyes, she saw it as something that would be satisfying to possess. It was the "grass" withheld from her that looked greener. Finally, she believed the tree could supply wisdom like that possessed by God; therefore it appealed to her ambition.

### **An Undisclosed Aim**

Satan's undisclosed aim, the aim of every temptation, is to induce people to act outside of the will of God, to be their own authority and thus their own God. The forbidden fruit was not evil in and of itself. It was evil to eat the fruit simply because God had forbidden it, and death was the result of disobeying because God had determined it to be so.

## CONCLUSION

Our first line of defense against temptation lies in knowing the Word of God. This is because Satan's methodology always involves denying the truth of God's Word and twisting its meaning in order to divert us from His will. However, both Adam and Eve knew God's will. There was no question in their minds about what was forbidden. Yet, they both yielded to temptation. Why? It was because Satan is a master deceiver. Therefore, knowledge of his methodology is crucial. It is our last line of defense. We simply must be able to recognize his methods of subtlety, enticement, and deception. They are red flags that signal imminent danger.

## **Part Two:**

# **Guard the Avenues of Temptation**

## 4

## PLEASURE LANE (The Love of Pleasure)

A virus is a microscopic organism that lives in a cell of another living thing. The virus that causes cold symptoms is carried into the human respiratory tract by air currents and attaches itself to a cell. In time, it begins to reproduce and spread to other cells. If we could see a virus, we would avoid inhaling it, but we cannot. We cannot see a virus with the naked eye because it is too small. It can only be seen with the aid of an electron microscope. When a virus enters our body, we have no warning. We are not aware of an intruder's presence until we are confronted with the symptoms it produces, but our body soon reacts. We experience a runny nose, sneezing, headache, and other symptoms—all the result of this intruder. Likewise, when we are tempted by the Devil a similar process unfolds. We cannot see the devil because he is a spirit being. Furthermore, he doesn't want us to be aware of his presence. This is why he uses intermediaries in the process of temptation. He used a serpent to tempt Eve, and then Eve to tempt Adam (Gen. 3:1-6). So his presence is not easily detected, and we are often caught unaware by his temptations. How can we recognize the devil's approach? The answer is not in looking for him because we will never see him. On the other hand, we can pinpoint temptation when it occurs by how we react to it.

Temptation always involves an enticement, something that arouses desire or lust. James says, "but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (Jam. 1:14). When something arouses our desire, we need to take note of it. If that desire conflicts with what we know is right from God's word, we are being tempted. It may be something we encounter in our environment that arouses an ungodly desire or it could be an old habit that crops up. Satan has often played some part in the temptation, either in the past or at present. He is a master at orchestrating events and situations that produce enticement. Although he is often the cause, we cannot always identify his direct involvement. We cannot see him, but we can become aware of how it is that he approaches us. It is through some desire. In the end, all that is important is to know that we are being tempted, and the arousal of ungodly desire is the symptom that reveals it.

Imagine standing at an intersection where three roads meet and imagine that temptation always approaches by means of one of these roads. These roads represent three types of ungodly desires. All must be monitored. The first one that we will consider is the desire to satisfy physical lusts. John calls this desire "the cravings of sinful man" (1 John 2:16). We can easily remember this avenue of temptation by referring to it as "Pleasure Lane." Satan utilized every available avenue of temptation on Jesus during his temptation beginning with the appeal of "Pleasure Lane."

**Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him**

**and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matt. 4:1-4)**

The point of application for us is that we need to keep a careful watch over our fleshly desires as Jesus did, and master them rather than allowing them to master us. Satan will surely visit us by means of “Pleasure Lane.” He will target our flesh. It is not a question of whether he will tempt us in this way; it is only a matter of when he will entice us. This reality carries with it two very important alternatives for our daily life, both are apparent in the temptation of Christ.

## **INDESCRIMINATE GRATIFICATION**

When Satan appeals to the desires of our flesh, he always entices us to gratify our physical desires indiscriminately, without regard to God’s will. In other words, he doesn’t want us to make careful distinctions about how and when to gratify our fleshly desires. He relies on two factors to keep us from making such distinctions.

### **An Unguarded Moment**

We are most vulnerable at certain unguarded moments in life. This holds true for any avenue of temptation, but especially for the lust of the flesh. The scriptures tell us that Jesus was led of the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil (v. 1). The verb translated “led” actually means to cast out. The translation in Mark 1:12 captures the idea by translating, “At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert.” We need to understand that God allowed the temptation of Christ to prove his sinless nature. And so, the Spirit placed him into an exceedingly difficult set of circumstances. He was alone, and on the human plane there was nobody to hold him accountable. He would have been physically exhausted and hungry due to forty days of fasting. Although he could not sin, in human terms this placed him in an exceedingly vulnerable physical condition. Perhaps Satan thought he could take advantage of the situation, but Jesus was unyielding. For us, however, pre-occupation with physical deprivation easily results in a greater level of vulnerability. We need to be on guard during times when we are alone, physically tired, sick, or mentally exhausted. Satan will be eager to take advantage of us during these vulnerable moments. There are also certain times of life when we are more vulnerable, for example, when we are young and spiritually inexperienced, or when we reach mid-life—a time when many succumb to temptations they previously overcame. In a survey of its readers in 1992, *Discipleship Journal* noted that 57% of respondents felt that temptations were more potent when they were physically tired. Also, when these respondents ranked the areas of greatest spiritual challenge to them, at least three of the top ten concerned the “cravings of sinful men”—laziness, sexual lust, and gluttony.<sup>6</sup>

Another opportune moment for Satan to tempt us is when we involve ourselves in some important ministry. Obviously, he would be interested in derailing us any time we seek to further the cause of Christ in some way. It is no coincidence that Jesus had just been baptized and openly declared the “Son of God” (Matt. 3:13-17) when he was tempted. This was a key juncture in his earthly life. Now, at the beginning of his public ministry, but before his ministry began in earnest, he was tempted. We too can expect temptation at certain key junctures of our life.

Therefore, we need to be especially watchful when we enter into, or are about to enter into some significant phase of our life or some particular ministry that benefits the cause of Christ.

### **An Absence of Discernment**

If Satan can catch us at a vulnerable moment, his hope is that we will act to gratify our flesh without exercising careful discernment. Satan proposed to Jesus a seemingly legitimate rational for satisfying his physical hunger. English translations imply that Satan was questioning Jesus' divinity when he said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (v. 3). However, the Greek grammatical construction, a first class condition, indicates that Satan was assuming his divinity. A better translation of the word "if" would be the word "since." Satan was implying that there was no reason for him to be hungry since he had the power to turn stone into bread. Implied also was the fact that he didn't deserve to suffer in this way. What Satan failed to address was the fact that God intended for Jesus to fast during his time of temptation. Remember that he was, "led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." After making this statement in verse one, Matthew immediately adds the fact that he had fasted for 40 days (v. 2) prior to being approached by the Devil (v. 3). So, he was obviously led by the Spirit to fast as well. It is important for us to note that nowhere in Scripture is fasting commanded of believers. However, fasting is presented in a positive light in Scripture and individual believers may well be led by the Spirit to fast at certain times, just as Jesus was here. Given God's intention for Jesus to fast, all of Satan's seemingly legitimate rational was negated. Satan was hoping that Jesus would fail to discern the subtle error involved in his proposal or that he would be unwilling to submit to God's will. The will of God may be unique to the individual, based on the Spirit's leading, or it may be a general and a clearly stated scriptural injunction. Jesus countered Satan's temptation by noting man's obligation to God's will above physical needs by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Regardless of how the will of God may be violated, Satan's objective is always for us to satisfy our fleshly desires without regard to right and wrong. Sins of the flesh fall into two primary categories, sexual sins and substance abuse. Substance abuse would include such things as alcohol abuse, prescription drug abuse, and the use of illegal drugs.

### **NECESSARY ABSTINENCE**

When Satan tempts us to gratify our physical desires indiscriminately, there is only one proper response—abstinence. We must abstain from indulging our physical desires without regard to God's moral guidelines. This is our second alternative and it is demonstrated by Jesus' response when he was tempted.

### **Without Regard to Desire**

Everyone has legitimate needs as Jesus did in this case. He was hungry (verse 2), probably hungrier than we could imagine. In general, there is nothing wrong with satisfying our hunger, but how and when we satisfy our hunger may make it wrong. We certainly can overindulge when we are hungry. Eating can even become an emotional crutch that we use to make us feel better when confronted with problems. The point is that every physical need must be regulated. They need to be satisfied in the right way and at the right time within the

boundaries of God's prescribed will. When Jesus said that man should not live by bread alone (verse 4), he was saying that we should not conduct our lives on the basis of our physical desires alone. Human sexual needs are another case in point. Sexual gratification is part of God's plan for human beings, but sexual desires must be regulated. God has set certain boundaries for the satisfaction of sexual needs. Premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality are outside of those boundaries according to Scripture. Whatever the perceived need is, the existence of that need does not make inappropriate gratification legitimate. There is a higher priority. Peter acknowledged it when he said, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul (1 Pet. 2:11)."

### **In Accord With God's Will**

Jesus countered Satan's proposal by quoting the Word of God (Dt. 8:3). We must not assume that quoting Scripture is some sort of magical formula for putting Satan to flight. He is not afraid of Scripture as if it were some kind of "silver bullet." The point that Jesus made by quoting Scripture was that men are required to live in accordance with God's Word, "on every word that comes from the mouth of God (v. 4)," and that he intended to do so. Recalling God's word is important when we are tempted, in that it reminds us of God's will for us. What is important is that we know the Word of God so that we may obey it. As David said, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psa. 119:11).

In addition to what we can learn from our current text, many practical admonitions and examples concerning how we can be victorious over the flesh are contained in God's word. Several are pertinent here. First, we need to guard our thought life by keeping our thoughts focused on what is pure (Phil. 4:8). Second, we need to be careful concerning at what we look. Jesus said that if we look at a woman lustfully, we have—in effect—committed adultery (Matt. 5:28). David's sin with Bathsheba took it a step farther (2 Sam. 11:2-4). First, he saw her washing herself (vs. 2). Then he gathered information about her (vs. 3). Finally, he sent for her and slept with her (vs. 4). All may have been avoided, if he had averted his vision upon noticing her. Finally, Paul told Timothy to flee from youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22). Fleeing from a tempting situation eliminates the possibility of yielding to that temptation. Consider how Joseph fled from the presence of his master's wife when he was tempted (Gen. 39:12).

### **CONCLUSION**

In view of the solemn fact that we will be tempted to satisfy our physical desires apart from God's plan, we must guard this entry point to temptation. To do so, we have to know what the Word of God sanctions and what it forbids. Furthermore, we must be committed to the Holy Spirit's leadership in our lives. In short, we should never take a thoughtless stroll down "Pleasure Lane."

## 5

## OPPORTUNITY AVENUE (The Problem of Pride)

Playground bullies, gang members, and violent criminals have a higher self-esteem than do other members of society. So, concluded social scientist Dr. Roy F. Baumeister after a ten-year study of the relationship between aggression and self-esteem. The results of his research published in the April, 2001 issue of *Scientific American*, run counter to the long accepted theory that violent criminals are afflicted with low self-esteem. His article, appropriately entitled *Violent Pride*, suggests that people with a high self-esteem are more likely to respond aggressively when they are criticized, insulted, or frustrated in some way. John Rosemond in a syndicated article on parenting from April 24, 2001 comments on Baumeister's findings.

In short: the higher one's self-esteem, the lower one's self-control. Doesn't it make perfect sense that the higher one thinks of oneself, the less regard one has for others?

What distinguishes Dr. Baumeister's conclusion is its 180 degree departure from the prevailing humanistic assumption. Society, as a whole, doesn't view high self-esteem as a problem at all. Instead, it is promoted, especially in educational circles where teachers reward students without regard to merit in order to enhance self-esteem. Biblical teaching stands in stark contrast to all of this. What Dr. Baumeister has identified is the age-old problem of pride that God's Word often warns us about. See, for example, Luke 18:14.<sup>7</sup>

What is apparent from all of this is how effectively Satan twists the truth. Certainly, he has confused the world about pride, making what is actually bad, seem to be good. In reality, pride is sinful and it is a weakness that Satan exploits. When Satan approached Eve in the Garden, he appealed to her pride, telling her that she could be like God (Gen. 3:5-6). John the apostle warns us to beware of pride, what he calls, "the boasting of what he has and does" (1 John 2:16). Pride is another avenue of temptation. Once again, imagine standing at an intersection where three roads meet. Temptation always approaches us on one or more of these roads. These three avenues in our mental imagery represent three types of ungodly desires. The first is the desire to satisfy physical desires. John calls this desire "the cravings of sinful man" (1 John 2:16). We called this avenue of temptation, "Pleasure Lane." The desire to be something more than we are is the second avenue of temptation. We can easily remember it by referring to it as "Opportunity Avenue."

Failing in his appeal to get Jesus to satisfy his physical desires apart from the will of God, Satan next enticed him to glorify himself apart from his Father's will.

**Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you**

**up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Mt. 4:5-7)**

Although Satan is often the cause of temptation, we cannot always identify his direct involvement as easily as Jesus did. Remember, he is a spirit being and we cannot see him. However, we can become aware of how it is that he approaches us. It is always through some desire. In the end, all that is important is to know that we are being tempted, and it is the arousal of some ungodly desire that reveals it. So, the point of application for us is that we need to keep a careful watch over our pride, as Jesus did, and refuse to indulge it. Satan will target our pride. It is not a question of whether he will tempt us in this way—it is only a matter of when. He will certainly tempt us by appealing to our pride. This reality carries with it two alternatives for us to consider. Both are apparent in the temptation of Christ.

### **SELF-GLORIFICATION**

When Satan appeals to our pride, he tempts us to assert ourselves solely for the sake of our own prestige. The Christian’s duty is to honor God (1 Cor. 6:20), but Satan would have us honor ourselves by asserting our superiority over others. This is exactly the opposite of what God requires of us, which is to consider others better than ourselves—literally higher in rank (Phil. 2:3). Sinful self-glorification involves three components that are apparent in verses five and six.

#### **A Public Display**

The highest point of the temple was a very visible place. It was probably a point on the roof that covered Herod’s portico. The portico, which was part of Herod the Great’s reconstruction, was an open porch covered with a roof that encompassed the courtyard of the Temple. It was in this sheltered area that the Rabbis debated each other, and often instructed their students. The highest point was probably a point on the roof of the portico somewhere on the eastern side of the Temple overlooking the Kidron Valley. Josephus, an ancient Jewish historian, said that it was a four hundred and fifty foot drop from the highest point of the temple to the valley floor. In comparison, the Washington Monument is approximately five hundred and fifty-five feet tall. The spectacle of jumping from the highest point of the temple would be comparable to someone jumping off the Washington Monument. Something of this nature carried out in a very public way in the midst of a very busy city would create quite a stir. Self-glorification always involves a public display.

#### **Selfish Motivation**

Not only did Satan propose a public display, he also suggested that Jesus act out of his own selfish motivation, asserting his own will as a matter of pride. Again note carefully what Satan said: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.” Once more, the first class condition indicates that there was an assumption of truth involved. Satan wasn’t questioning the divinity of Jesus. Instead, he was appealing to it. What he said is equivalent to saying, “*Since you are the Son of God, cast yourself down.*” The appeal was for him to take matters into his own hands, to assert himself. The problem with what Satan suggested was that it wasn’t God’s time for Christ

to be glorified. It was premature. His incarnation and eventual crucifixion required that he humble himself, and be obedient to the will of the Father (Phil. 2:7-8). In God's plan, only after his humiliation would he be exalted (Phil. 2:9-11). Satan would always have us ignore God's will and assert our own self-will. J. Oswald Sanders has well described the insidious nature of such self-glorification.

Pride is a sin of whose presence its victim is least conscious. But nothing is more distasteful to God than self-conceit. This first and fundamental sin in essence aims at enthroning self at the expense of God.<sup>8</sup>

### **Making An Impression**

Finally, self-glorification seeks to impress others with our importance, appearance, or ability. In Jesus' case, casting himself off the highest point of the temple would have had the effect of identifying him as the Messiah. Satan rightly reminded Jesus that Psalm 91:11-12 promised that the angels would protect him from harm. Such a display would openly prove that he was the Messiah. He would have impressed a lot of people and he would have had an instant following. Pride is always about impressing others and lording it over others rather than serving others. C. S. Lewis observes that the very nature of pride is competitive.

Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.<sup>9</sup>

We may not think that we are prideful. We may do a good job of covering up our desire to impress others with our importance, achievements, or authority, but we are vulnerable in this area. Pride is part of our fallen nature and often shows up when we are challenged or offended. When we are criticized for the way we do something, we are tempted to quit serving others altogether. When we are mistreated or ignored, we may become overly angry or irritable. Responses such as these demonstrate that pride is lurking below the surface of our otherwise polite demeanor waiting for an opportunity to come forth. Satan knows this and this is why he so very often targets our pride.

## **NECESSARY HUMILITY**

Satan will certainly tempt us by appealing to our pride. When he tempts us in the area of pride, he will tempt us to glorify ourselves in some way. This calls for a specific response on our part. The second alternative available to us is humility. Instead of asserting ourselves for the sake of our own prestige, we need to humble ourselves so that God may be glorified. Humility focuses on God, not self; and it does so in two specific ways.

### **Submission To God's Will**

It is pride that leads to selfishly making our own plans and expecting God to bless them. Humility involves recognizing God's authority over us and seeking to fulfill his will. If Jesus had thrown himself down from the highest point of the temple, the angels would have spared him

from harm. However, in making such a choice, he would have acted contrary to the will of God the Father. Such a display would have certainly impressed those who watched. Knowing the scriptures they would have been convinced that he was the King they were expecting. However, ruling over Israel was not God's purpose for him at that time. If Jesus had yielded to this temptation, it would have meant stepping out of God's will and reigning over men without redeeming mankind. It is important to note that Jesus didn't refuse to act on Satan's suggestion because he feared that he might not survive, but because it would force God to act in his behalf. The promise of Psalm 91:11-12 could be depended upon, but it was not right for him to purposefully put God to the test of fulfilling it. Such an act was prohibited in Deuteronomy 6:16. So he responded, "It is written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

### **Concern With God's Glory**

Our purpose in life is to glorify God—not ourselves (1 Cor. 6:20, 10:31). To engage in self-glory is prideful and contrary to our purpose in life. Only when we humble ourselves, can we glorify God. Jesus, although he was the divine Son, voluntarily submitted himself to the Father's will at his incarnation (Phil. 2:6-8). To have blatantly sought his own exaltation prematurely by casting himself off the highest point of the Temple would have been an act that ran counter to the Father's plan. It would have been a misguided attempt at self-glory. However, His concern was with the Father's will rather than his own benefit. Furthermore, it was this voluntary humiliation that eventually would result in the exaltation of his human nature (Phil. 2:9). The same holds true for us. If we exalt ourselves, God will humble us. On the other hand, if we humble ourselves, God will exalt us. This truth is repeatedly emphasized in the scriptures (Lk. 18:14, Jam. 4:10, 1 Pet. 5:6). Pride will not be our downfall, if humility is our practice. Perhaps the best practical admonition in regard to exercising humility is found in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." To consider others better than ourselves means that we are to treat every other person as if they were of higher rank than ourselves. It means submitting ourselves to their needs and desires.

An antidote from the life of George Washington provides us with such a picture of humility. The General once rode up on a group of soldiers struggling to move a heavy piece of timber as a corporal stood by shouting, "Heave!" "Why don't you help them?" asked the General. "Me? Why, I'm a corporal sir!" said the soldier. Dismounting, Washington took a place along side of the soldiers and helped them move the timber into place. As he re-mounted his horse, he addressed the corporal, "The next time you have a piece of timber for your men to handle, corporal, send for the commander-in-chief."<sup>10</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

In view of the solemn fact that we will be tempted in regard to our pride, we must guard this entry point of temptation. We must humble ourselves and seek only God's glory. We must throw up a roadblock on "Opportunity Avenue" that will stop Satan's approach.

## 6

## **EASY STREET (The Danger of Materialism)**

When Gregory Thomas, a man with a long criminal record, was arrested for stealing two Polo jackets from Dayton's department store in Roseville, Minnesota in November of 1996, he quickly identified his longtime clients in an effort to help his own cause. Agreeing to assist the police, Thomas was allowed to make his next appointment with his clients at their \$400,000 home accompanied by a Dayton's theft investigator posing as a department store cleaning woman. Soon after, Police arrested a prominent Roseville dentist, his wife, a son employed by a promotions firm, and a daughter—a Chicago insurance attorney. All four were charged with receiving stolen property. Thomas, police said, was the family's designated shoplifter. Inside the residence authorities found nine rolling racks of designer clothing worth thousands of dollars. Some individual items carried a retail value of over two thousand dollars.<sup>11</sup> It matters not whether we have little or much, no one is exempt from the appeal of material possessions. Someone once asked millionaire John D. Rockefeller, "How much does it take to satisfy a man completely?" He replied, "It takes a little bit more than he has."<sup>12</sup> Contentment is elusive because Satan is very effective in his temptations. Not only does the world pursue pleasure and display pride, it is also focused on possessing things. No one is immune. The "god" of this age has made his mark.

As previously noted, Satan's strategy hasn't changed since it became evident in the beginning. He approached Eve with a temptation that not only appealed to her physical desires and to her pride, but also to her desire for material gain. Before she partook of the fruit, she concluded that it was pleasing to the eyes—that it was desirable and worth possessing. The Apostle John warned us against the indiscriminate pursuit of that which pleases our eyes. He calls it "the lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16). This is the third avenue of temptation. During the Lord's time of testing in the wilderness Satan also approached him on this basis.

**Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Mt. 4:8-11)**

Before we examine the above passage of scripture, once again imagine yourself standing at an intersection where three avenues converge. To approach us, Satan must come down one of these three avenues. The first, we called *Pleasure Lane*. John calls this avenue "the cravings of sinful man" (1 John 2:16). It involves the pursuit of physical pleasure for pleasure's sake alone. We designated the second avenue of temptation, *Opportunity Avenue*. John calls it "boasting" (1 John 2:16). It involves the desire for personal status at any cost. We have examined the first two avenues of temptation already. Now, we will consider the third, the "lust of the eyes" (1 John

2:16). It is what we commonly call, “materialism.” If a person possesses great material wealth, he is said to be living on *Easy Street*. So, *Easy Street* is a good name for our third avenue of temptation. Once more, it is important to remember that we cannot see Satan approaching via *Easy Street* or any other avenue of temptation. However, we can feel the effects of his presence, be it lustful physical desires, prideful thoughts and actions, or the desire to possess something we do not have. When we become aware of inappropriate desires, an intrusion alert should go off in our minds.

Satan will certainly tempt us from time to time by appealing to our desire for material things, and particularly for those things that are not God’s will for us to own. This reality carries with it two alternatives for us to consider, and both may be discerned from the account of Satan’s temptation of Christ.

### **EXPENSIVE ACQUISITIONS**

When Satan tempts us to seek material possessions, he does so at the expense of our obeying God. It is not necessarily wrong to have material possessions, or to seek them. What Satan does is entice us to go beyond what God has determined that we need. God sets the boundaries of our material wealth by the means with which he supplies us. Satan entices us to go beyond what we can afford. In some cases this means the accumulation of burdensome debts that prevent us from utilizing our financial resources in ways that would glorify God. In other cases, some people, overcome by this sort of temptation, resort to dishonesty in business or even stealing from others. Always, Satan tempts us to acquire things at the expense of obeying God. This is the very thing he proposed to Jesus in Matthew 4:8-9. Two considerations are always involved: what we want, and what it costs.

#### **What We Want**

In order to tempt Jesus Satan took him to a place where he could show him all the kingdoms of the world (vs. 8). In Luke’s description of this event he adds that this was done instantaneously (Luke 4:5). How Satan did this is not revealed. Did Jesus actually see all of the world’s glory or was it something that happened in his mind’s eye. We cannot say, but at the very least, all the kingdoms of the world were included in a mental snapshot. We are enticed to possess what we see. As mentioned earlier, Eve found the forbidden fruit pleasing to the eye (Gen. 3:6), and John calls this avenue of temptation, “the lust of his eyes” (1 John 2:16). Spiros Zodhiates describes well the connection between our eyes and materialism.

When you fix your eyes on things, invariably it leads to materialism. You fix your eyes on things and you will continually be attracted to gadgets, money, an abundance of plastic, chrome, metal, wood, all the elements about us.<sup>13</sup>

What we see, we desire to possess. When we find our eyes lingering upon some material object, we should take notice. Satan may well be swaggering down *Easy Street*, headed in our direction.

## What It Costs

Satan offered to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor (vs. 9). How could he offer this world to its very creator? After God created Adam, he gave the first man dominion over all that he had created. Adam, however, yielded his dominion to Satan when he disobeyed God. Consequently, Satan became the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). Although God has retained ultimate authority over all, he has temporarily allowed Satan to exercise authority in this world. One day, Jesus will resume his direct authority over the earth, when he returns and establishes his kingdom. Until then, this world is—in a limited sense—Satan’s world. The subtlety of Satan’s temptation was in offering to Jesus prematurely what will ultimately be his. It was not God’s plan or his will for Jesus to reign over the earth at that point in time. For anything to be a legitimate possession, it must be obtained through legitimate means, and be within the scope of God’s will for us. If Jesus had accepted Satan’s offer, he would have taken possession of what someday will be his, but he would have been taking it in the wrong way and at the wrong time. Taking possession of what we desire is sinful when God’s will is violated in the process. Herein is the evil of materialism.

Survey results from 1992 published in the book, The Day America Told the Truth, illustrate just how willing people are to violate moral standards in order to possess wealth. Respondents were asked what they would do for ten million dollars. Twenty-five percent said that they would be willing to abandon their entire family for ten million dollars. Twenty-three percent said they would become a prostitute for a week. Sixteen percent said they would leave their spouse, and three percent would put their children up for adoption.<sup>14</sup>

## A PRIORITIZED LIFE

Serving God should always be our number one priority. This means that we must often refrain from seeking material things—lest they become our priority instead of serving God.

### Avoid Idols

Seeking material possessions at the expense of doing God’s will makes the things we desire into idols. To make an idol out of something material means that we have chosen to serve Satan rather than God. Satan is the author of idol worship and he is always the real and ultimate idol behind every material one (cf. 1 Cor. 10:19-20). This reality may not occur to us when some desirable object has caught our eye. Satan is very subtle and we do not always connect the dots. In this case, however, Satan’s proposition was straightforward. Perhaps he knew Jesus could not be fooled. He simply offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would fall down and worship him (vs. 9). He offered Jesus the world in exchange for worship. Our choices don’t seem so clear cut, but anytime we put material possessions ahead of God, we put Satan above God. This is the essence of materialism, and it is a temptation we must steadfastly resist. Allan Emery’s recollection of what his parents taught him about materialism is worth remembering.

My parents consistently taught us that all we had must be held with an open hand, that when we closed our fingers tightly over anything placed in our trust, we lost the

joy and the blessing. Things acquired as an end in themselves became idols and possessed us.<sup>15</sup>

## Serve God

God alone must be the object of our worship. Serving him and doing his will, must be our top priority. Jesus made this clear when he responded to Satan's offer by quoting the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament Law (cf. Deut. 6:13, 10:20). Man's obligation is to worship God alone, and serve him exclusively (vs. 10). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made equally clear the impossibility of a dual allegiance: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Jesus pointed to the Old Testament to clarify the will of God, but he prefaced his response with a simple command, "Away from me, Satan"—and Satan obeyed immediately (vs. 11). Afterwards angels came and ministered to Jesus due to his weakened physical condition (Mt. 4:2). This command, and the angels ministering to him indicate that his testing was over. He had been tempted in every possible way and had passed the test, proving himself to be the Son of God. We must not draw from this that we have the same authority over Satan that Jesus had. We cannot expect to successfully order Satan to stop tempting us. Some have made the point that we must speak audibly to Satan since he cannot read our minds. But, this presupposes that we have authority over him. Jesus had that authority, but we do not. Not even Michael, the archangel, presumed to give Satan orders of his own, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9). The matter of resisting Satan is wholly bound up in the choices we make as to whether we will listen to God or yield to the devil's temptations.

## CONCLUSION

Bruce Cook in his book, Faith Planning, tells about visiting a game park in Nairobi, Africa and learning how monkeys are captured for sale to zoos.

A shining metallic object is placed in a long-necked jar tied to a tree. As monkeys swing through the trees, their eyes catch the reflection of the sun on the shining object. Reaching into the jar poses no problem for them, but when they try to bring their closed fists through the narrow openings, they can't make it. To gain freedom, all the monkeys need to do is to let go of the worthless object. Instead, the monkeys sit by the jar holding onto the object until their captors come to take them away.<sup>16</sup>

Satan gains mastery over people in much the same way. He entices us with material possessions and when we seek to possess those things at the expense of obeying God, we are snared in a trap of our own making. We must learn not to reach into jars, and if we have already done so, to release from our grip those things that God has not permitted us to have.

**Part Three:**

**Access the Armor of God**

## 7

**BASIC TRAINING**

On February 22, 1998, a band of killer tornadoes swept through central Florida packing winds of up to 260 miles per hour. Thirty-eight people were killed and another two hundred and fifty were injured. Freddie Padgett, a resident of Geneva, Florida, was one of those injured. A tornado ripped through his motor home, sucked him up into its funnel, and deposited him into nearby Lake Henry over a mile away. The crew of a rescue helicopter later spotted him floating in the water. Padgett, who suffered broken ribs and other minor injuries, escaped certain death because he was wearing a life jacket. As had been his habit for years, he had worn a life preserver to bed that night after hearing the storm warnings. Thirty-eight people lost their lives that night, but Freddie Padgett was not among them because he took a seemingly unnecessary, but simple precaution. His lifelong fear of the water served him well—he was ready for the approaching danger.<sup>17</sup>

Anticipating danger and preparing for the worst is often a critical factor in survival situations. The same principle holds true in the face of spiritual danger. As Christians we need to have a healthy respect for Satan and the continual danger he poses to us. However, we often go about our daily lives without any conscious thought of the opposition we face. It is easy to become so preoccupied with the physical realm that we are oblivious to the spiritual. Yet, the Bible tells us that we have an active archenemy in the spiritual realm. Consider 1 Peter 5:8, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” The New Testament refers to Satan fifty-two times and uses the term “devil” another thirty-five times. Satan’s existence is a reality, and he is a very real threat. He tempted Jesus, sidetracked Peter, destroyed Ananias and Sapphira, and hindered Paul. None of us are beyond his reach or far from his mind. A state of war exists between us. Whether we realize it or not, a spiritual battle rages and we are under attack. Those who are routinely unaware of this conflict become easy prey for the enemy. This is why so many Christians, so often, fall into sin. Precautions must be taken. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians chapter six.

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, . . . (Eph. 6:10-13a)**

It is necessary to prepare ourselves for the enemy’s inevitable attack. How do we do this? Paul tells us that a three-fold state of readiness is needed.

## **ARMED FOR BATTLE**

Being faced with ongoing hostilities requires defensive measures. We need to access the spiritual armament that God provides. This is the first stage of readiness.

### **With God's Armor**

As spiritual combatants, we must be "strong in the Lord." Mere men, even those who are born-again, cannot prevail alone. Verses ten and eleven make it clear that we must put on the armor of God in order to be strong in the Lord. Paul does not yet discuss the armor itself, but here merely stresses its importance for victory. Sufficient to our discussion at this point is the fact that spiritual warriors must be equipped for battle. In any army, enlistment or conscription is the first step. Those placed under command are then provided with the weapons of war. As Christians we are soldiers in the Lord's army. Our King is under attack and we are under attack by virtue of our relationship to him. Therefore, he has made his armor available to us.

Another crucial element is involved in a soldier's success. A soldier must be obedient to his commander. This holds true in the spiritual battle as well. We are soldiers and although we are provided with all the resources needed to be victorious, we must also be obedient soldiers. The spiritual warrior must be Spirit-controlled (Eph. 5:18). In short, we must be submissive to God, our commander, in all things. If so, we will be successful soldiers. If we take up the weapons that have been provided and use them to do the will of God, our King, we will prevail because we will be strong in the power of God's might.

### **In Advance of Battle**

A soldier's provision and training in the proper use of his equipment must be completed in advance of any challenge mounted by the enemy. The verb translated "put on" in verse eleven is an imperative that commands us to dress ourselves in the armor that God has provided. The Greek verb tense specifies a single action taken at some point in time, obviously prior to any anticipated opposition. It would be dangerous, even ridiculous, for a soldier to go on patrol wearing only a pair of shorts and a tee shirt. It would be too late to retrieve his body armor and rifle in the case of an enemy attack. The same is true in the spiritual realm. It is up to us to prepare ourselves in advance of temptation by putting on the armor of God. Putting on the armor of God renders us strong in the power of the Lord's might and able to resist Satan's advances.

Martin Luther's picturesque description of his battle with Satan and temptation illustrates the importance of spiritual preparation.

Well, when he comes knocking upon the door of my heart, and asks, "Who lives here?" the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, "Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here." The Devil seeing the nail-prints in his hands, and the pierced side, takes flight immediately.

Victory depends on our relationship with the already victorious Christ and his power – not our own. Therefore, we must do what is required to have his power at our disposal in advance of any temptation

## **INFORMED ABOUT THE ENEMY**

The second stage of readiness involves being informed about the enemy we face so that we will be ready for his advances. Paul provides us with this information in verse twelve.

### **His Prowess**

The Devil is our primary enemy. In eternity past he rebelled against God and attempted to elevate himself to God's level. Consequently, he was cast out of God's presence (Isa.14:12-15, Ezk. 28:7-9, Rev. 12:7-9). It is important to remember that Satan is a spirit being that once dared to challenge God himself. He is not an ordinary flesh and blood enemy. Is it any wonder that we need to rely on God's strength to resist him? His intentions toward us are threefold. First, he seeks to *defeat* us by inducing us to sin. Then, he proceeds to *defame* us by accusing us before God (Rev. 12:10). His accusations, in effect, make us trophies in his ongoing conflict with God. Finally, Satan seeks to *destroy* us by enslaving us to sin and its inevitable results.

### **His Tactics**

If we are to stand, we must be able to stand against the devil's "schemes" (v. 11). The word translated "schemes" in verse eleven refers to "methods" or "methodologies." His methods—merely referenced here—can be easily identified in scripture. They involve the methods discussed in chapter three: his subtlety, deception, and enticement. They also include the avenues of approach discussed in chapters four through six; the Apostle John refers to these avenues as: "the cravings of sinful men, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does" (1 John 2:16). Satan targeted these human desires in the garden when he tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). He appealed to her flesh when he tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit. He also appealed to her desire to possess what was forbidden. And, finally, he approached her from the standpoint of pride telling her she would become like God if she ate the forbidden fruit. Satan employed the same approach when he tempted Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11). He appealed to his flesh when he suggested turning the stone into bread. He counted on the desire for material gain when he showed him all the kingdoms of the world. He tempted him on the basis of pride when he suggested that he cast himself off the highest point of the temple. Satan always uses subtlety, deception, and enticement along with these three avenues of approach to produce powerful temptations in our lives. Paul refers to all of these tactics as, "the devil's schemes."

Satan's tactics have not changed or varied over the years. *Discipleship Journal* asked its readers to rank their greatest temptations. The results in order of rank and their identification with the three avenues of temptation follow: 1) materialism (the lust of the eyes), 2) pride (boasting), 3) self-centeredness (boasting, a pride issue), 4) laziness (the craving of the flesh), 5) anger (a pride issue), 6) bitterness (a pride issue), 7) sexual lust (the craving of the flesh), 8) envy (the lust of the eyes), 9) gluttony (the craving of the flesh) and 10) lying (a pride issue).<sup>18</sup>

## **His Virtual Omnipresence**

When Satan (Lucifer) rebelled against God, many other angels joined with him in his rebellion and were judged with him by God (Rev. 12:4, 9). These fallen angels are called demons elsewhere in scripture. They are spirit beings as is Satan. Our enemies are not mere flesh and blood, and they are many. This is why believers need God's strength. Paul further identifies the demonic spirits we face in regard to the various roles they play in opposing God's children. Mark Bubeck offers the following explanation as to what these roles may be. He connects the Greek word translated "rulers" to the possible delegation of geographic authority. He suggests that the "authorities" may refer to those demons that seek authority over the lives of individual believers. He further suggests that "powers of this dark world" may be a classification of demons assigned to world leaders (Dan. 10:13). Finally, he contends that "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" may refer to those demons assigned to various religions.<sup>19</sup> Nothing can be stated about the above terms with absolute certainty, but it is obvious that we face a numerous and highly organized army. Satan is their commander-in-chief and his demons give him virtual omnipresence. Although we often give Satan the credit, individual believers are not routinely tempted by Satan, but by one or more of his demons. In a similar way, we might say that the United States and its allies defeated Hitler in World War II, when in reality it was Hitler's army that was defeated. So, although it might be said that an individual resisted Satan or was tempted by Satan, in reality it was one or more of his demons that was directly involved.

### **DETERMINED TO RESIST**

Since we are faced with this ongoing battle, we need to be determined in our resistance. This is the third state of readiness. Verses eleven through thirteen emphasize this steadfast state of mind.

#### **Refusing to Yield.**

It is our obligation to "stand against the devil's schemes" (v. 11) and to stand our ground (v. 13). In physical combat the soldier's goal is to hold his ground and if possible advance against the enemy. In spiritual combat, believers must hold their moral ground. Satan wishes to move believers away from their commitment to do what is right. Believers must be determined to withstand Satanic attack. Many run up the white flag at the first sign of the enemy believing they are unable to resist. They give up and to give in to temptation rather than resist it. They often describe temptations as too powerful to resist, but this is a lie. No temptation is beyond the believer's power to resist. When we are tested, God always provides a way for us to handle it (1 Cor. 10:13). The key to successful resistance is our attitude toward the conflict.

At the first battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861, General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and his men refused to retreat from a federal attack although Confederate troops were being driven back in mass. Jackson and his men through their heroic efforts stopped the Union advance, earning General Jackson his famous nickname. Jackson's men, inspired by his leadership, stood their ground. So, it is in the spiritual battle. Those of us who believe we can resist, those who are determined to resist, with God's help, can and do resist temptations. Withstanding temptation must be our unwavering goal.

## Personally Engaged

Holding one's ground begins with determination, but requires active resistance. Paul says that, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (v. 12). The word translated "struggle" means to engage in hand-to-hand combat. Hand to hand combat requires personal involvement. When we are attacked, we must put up a fight. We must engage in active resistance against the enemy. James tells us that the only way to make the devil flee (i.e. cease his attack) is to resist him (Jam. 4:7). Peter also emphasizes the need for active resistance, advising us to "resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:9).

## CONCLUSION

At the battle of Gettysburg an officer told Confederate General James Longstreet that he could not bring his men up again—meaning that he could not convince them to make another attack upon the enemy. Longstreet's response was, "Very well; never mind, then; just let them stay where they are; the enemy is going to advance, and that will spare you the trouble."<sup>20</sup> What was true on that day and in that battle is also true of every spiritual battle in which we are engaged. Satan will attack. We cannot avoid the conflict. The only question is whether we will stand or fall. We must be prepared, informed, and determined. Are you ready?



## 8

## SPIRITUAL ARMOR (Part 1)

In September of 1977 Terry Schafer purchased a Christmas gift for her husband, David, a police officer. She was so excited about the gift that she couldn't wait until Christmas and gave him the gift early. On October first, David pulled over a robbery suspect. As he approached the car, the suspect shot him in the abdomen with a .45-caliber pistol. Christmas came early for David Schafer, and it saved his life. He was wearing the new vest that his wife had given him for Christmas, a bulletproof vest.<sup>21</sup> Officer Schafer was not seriously injured because of his wife's foresight. Furthermore, he had taken the time to put on the bulletproof vest that evening before his shift began. His life was spared because he was prepared for the assault.

Almost any successful endeavor requires preparation. Athletes must condition themselves before they compete. New businesses begin with a business plan. Successful careers require years of educational preparation. Successful trips are planned in advance. Retirement requires financial planning. Even doing something as simple as staying warm in cold weather requires putting on warm clothing before going outside. It is only reasonable to conclude that spiritual success also requires preparation.

Every believer is involved in a spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-13). We are tempted on a daily basis and must wrestle against demonic powers. Being prepared for this conflict is the key to victory. We need the Lord's power. It is only in his strength that we can be victorious (v. 10). This requires putting on the full armor of God (v. 11). Ephesians 6:14-15 describes the first three components of spiritual armor.

**And after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.  
(Eph. 6:13b-15)**

Every believer needs to access God's provision for spiritual protection. These two verses tell us how.

### ACKNOWLEDGE TRUTH

The first way to access God's protective power is by acknowledging truth. Consider the first half of verse fourteen in this regard.

## **Objective Truth**

The Greek word translated “truth” in verse fourteen refers to the content of truth. The world in which we live typically denies the existence of objective truth, but God’s Word presents truth as unchanging, precise, and objective in content. As Christians, we often wonder about such things, as how the world can accept the practice of abortion and at the same time oppose capital punishment for convicted murderers. This is because the world perceives truth as situational and relative. One survey found that sixty-seven percent of Americans agree that there is no such thing as objective truth.<sup>22</sup> Satan has done his work well. Jesus called him the, “father of lies” (Jn 8:44). He is a master deceiver that has deceived the world into believing that there is no objective, unchanging truth. His ability to deceive is his primary weapon, and he is not content with deceiving the unsaved world alone. He knows that if he can cause us to doubt God’s Word, then he can influence our thinking as believers and ultimately our behavior as well.

Two lies accompany every temptation. Satan tells men that sinful behavior will do no harm, and that there is actually something of value to be gained by it. This is illustrated by the devil’s temptation of Eve. He told her that she would not die as a result of eating the forbidden fruit, but instead that she would actually become like God (Gen. 3:4-5). This, of course, was a direct contradiction of God’s Word (Gen. 2:17). If we are to resist temptation, we must first know the truth and then maintain an unwavering commitment to it.

## **Protective Truth**

Paul was under the guard of Roman soldiers when he penned the letter to the Ephesians. Therefore, he was well acquainted with the Roman soldier’s protective armor. It was this armor that he used to illustrate for us the spiritual armor of God that we need to wear.

A Roman soldier wore a heavy leather belt around his waist. This was an essential piece of equipment because every other piece of armor connected to it. Paul says that we should have the belt of truth buckled around our waist. In Paul’s day, the abdomen was considered the seat of emotions. Truth, when it is acknowledged and heeded, protects us from emotional trauma. In contrast, when we doubt God’s Word, we are left to the mercy of our own emotions. Deprived of any sure foundation for our actions, our lustful desires soon overwhelm us (1 Jn 2:15-16).

## **DO WHAT IS RIGHT**

The second way we can access the protective power of God is by choosing ahead of time to do what is right. This means having in place the “breastplate of righteousness” (14b).

## **Practical Righteousness**

Paul is not referring to the doctrine of justification here. Believers are justified—declared righteous—by God when they accept Christ by faith (Rom. 5:1). Justification establishes positional righteousness before God. Positional righteousness is based on Christ’s death in our place and not in any way by our own efforts. What Paul is referring to in verse fourteen is practical righteousness—not positional righteousness. This is clear because while it is God who

gives us positional righteousness, it is the believer's responsibility to put on the armor of God for himself.

### **A Predetermined Choice**

The Roman soldier's breastplate covered his chest and protected his heart. In Paul's day the heart was considered the seat of the will. A person's will is what determines his actions—whether right or wrong. The breastplate of righteousness protects the Christian soldier in that it shields him from wrong choices. Again, since the armor of God is to be put on prior to the battle, the breastplate of righteousness is a predetermined choice—a choice to do what is right. Those who have not made-up their minds to follow the right course in advance of temptation are in greater danger of making the wrong choice when temptations come. The breastplate of righteousness can be equated with the believer's dedication to God (Rom. 12:1-2).

I accepted Christ at eight years of age, but it was not until I was nineteen that I gave up control of my life to Christ. I have not lived a perfect life, but I have lived much closer to Christ since that time because my decision to serve him was made those many years ago.

Too many pay lip service to Christ but have not made up their minds to serve him. A ruthless businessman whom Mark Twain encountered in Boston announced his intentions to travel to Mount Sinai, climb to the top, and read the Ten Commandments at the top of his voice. Unimpressed, Twain advised him to stay home instead and try keeping the Ten Commandments.<sup>23</sup> All too often Christians fall into sin because they haven't settled the issue of obedience.

## **APPROPRIATE GOD'S PEACE**

Finally, God's protective power is available through his peace. This component of spiritual armor is equated with the Roman soldier's footwear (v. 15).

### **Good News**

The footwear mentioned in this verse is, "the gospel of peace." In this case, the word "gospel" is not used in its technical sense to refer to the message of salvation. Instead, it simply means "good news" and is used as a simple modifier of the word, "peace." Possessing the peace of God is certainly good news. Note also that the peace mentioned here is not peace *with* God, which is positional and received at salvation (Rom. 5:1). Rather, it is the peace *of* God, which is available to the believer through prayer (Phil. 4:6-7).

### **Freedom from Fear**

The Roman soldier wore sandals that were rough soled to give him traction and stability. His footwear was part of his preparation for battle. In enumerating the armor of God, Paul says that the peace of God is our footwear, and that such peace readies us for the spiritual battle. Just as the Roman soldier's footwear gave him better mobility and stability, the peace of God does the same in the spiritual arena. A lack of peace means the presence of fear, and fear paralyzes us.

Recently, my wife stayed in the car while I took care of some business. I thought I had locked the doors, but I had not. Seeing that my headlights were still on and not noticing my wife, a kind stranger opened the driver's door and reached in to turn off the headlights. Upon noticing my wife, he embarrassingly excused himself and quickly departed. My wife never moved and never said a word. I asked her later why she didn't open her door and get out when she saw the man opening the other door; she explained that she was so frightened that she couldn't move or speak. Fear paralyzes. Where there is worry and fear, obedience is inhibited. Worry over finances can inhibit our giving. When we fear failure we may not volunteer our services. Fear paralyzes.

Peace, on the other hand, frees us from the fears that Satan preys upon to induce disobedience. We need to take every fear to the Lord in prayer, and the peace of God that passes understanding will soon replace it (Phil. 4:6-7).

### **CONCLUSION**

For years we have played Electronic Battleship at our house. It's a game of strategy that pits two opposing toy fleets against each other in battle. When each fleet's positions are programmed into the game, a commanding voice says, "Prepare for battle!" This too is Paul's message to us in Ephesians 6:14-15—"Prepare for battle!" The conflict will soon be upon us. Prepare now. Prepare beforehand. Prepare before it is too late. Put on the armor of God so that you may stand.

## 9

## SPIRITUAL ARMOR (Part 2)

On March 8, 1862, the CSS Virginia, operating alone out of Hampton Roads, Virginia against a squadron of blockading Union vessels, sank two Union ships—the USS Congress and the USS Cumberland—and scattered the rest of the squadron, while sustaining practically no damage to herself. How was it that a single ship could accomplish so much against a superior force? The Virginia was an armored ship—an ironclad—better known historically as the “Merrimac,” the name it bore before it was captured by the Confederate navy, fitted with iron plates, and renamed. The next day, March 9, the Virginia fought its famous battle with the Union ironclad, the “Monitor.” The four-hour, close-range duel ended in a draw. Neither ship was able to pierce the other’s armor.

Defensive armor has always been an asset in warfare. Ancient warriors and medieval knights wore armor. Modern warships and battle tanks depend on armor. Even the modern infantryman wears lightweight body armor. Armor provides essential protection against enemy attack.

In the spiritual realm, armor is equally essential. Christians are constantly under attack. Satan wants to defeat, defame, and ultimately destroy the lives of believers (Eph. 6:11-12). In order to defend themselves, believers need to be outfitted with the armor of God (Eph. 6:11, 13). Paul was well aware of the Roman soldier’s armor, and he used it to help his readers picture the unseen armor of God that believers need. It is this armor that we need in order to protect us against temptation.

So far Paul has described the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of peace. Each of these is crucial, but more is needed. Now, in verses sixteen and seventeen, he describes three more pieces of spiritual armor we need to wear.

**In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:16-17)**

Along with the three pieces of armor already described, we need to put on these three additional pieces of armor. Again, Paul tells us how we can access God’s protective power.

### EXERCISE FAITH

The fourth way to access God’s protective power is by exercising faith. Notice what Paul says in verse sixteen.

## **Faith is Trust in God**

The faith referred to here is not initial saving faith, but faith exercised on a daily basis. It involves living one's life with complete confidence in God. The shield that was carried by the Roman infantryman was nearly large enough to protect his whole body. A line of advancing soldiers often held their shields together to protect them from enemy arrows. These shields were made of leather and were often dipped in water prior to battle so that they would extinguish flaming arrows. With such protection, the soldier could confidently advance against the enemy in battle. Likewise, faith gives spiritual warriors the confidence to trust God and resist temptation.

## **Temptation Involves Doubting God**

The fiery arrows Satan shoots at us are arrows of doubt. When someone yields to temptation, it is almost always because that person was induced to doubt God rather than trust him. Satan tempted Eve to doubt God's truthfulness, saying, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). He also suggested to her mind the idea that God was holding out on her when he said, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Peter is another example. He denied the Lord out of fear, doubting God's ability or willingness to protect him if he was truthful (Mk 14:60-72). Resisting temptation requires faith in God. The best way to develop faith is by feeding on God's Word and saturating one's mind with the promises of God. Consider what Paul said in Romans 10:17: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

## **OBTAIN ASSURANCE OF SALVATION**

Another way to access God's protection is by obtaining assurance of our salvation. This is indicated in the first part of verse seventeen.

### **The Certainty of Salvation**

Since we are told to put on the "helmet of salvation," the helmet here cannot possibly refer to our eternal salvation, because we cannot save ourselves. Salvation is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Yet, the helmet that we must put on is somehow connected to salvation because it is called the "helmet of salvation." It can only be that it refers to our certainty of salvation. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). The Spirit of God has sealed us unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is God's down payment on our eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14). Without a doubt, our final salvation is certain. However, we still need to have a firm personal assurance of this fact. This assurance is our "helmet of salvation."

### **Spiritual Protection**

The settled assurance of eternal salvation is necessary protection for our minds as we wage spiritual warfare. My own experience is an example. I was not taught as a young Christian that salvation is eternally secure. I thought that I had to avoid sin in order to hold on to it. Those

who hold this view believe it is the only reason for believers to live right, and that those who teach the security of the believer are only giving people an excuse to sin. I found the opposite to be true. A person who believes he can lose his salvation, as I once did, will assume that he has lost it the moment he yields to any significant temptation. Now, if you think that you have lost your salvation, what is the point of resisting temptation any longer? There is none. Of course, we might reason that we can be saved again later, but why be in a hurry? At the moment, we might as well indulge ourselves. There cannot possibly be any further consequences. On the other hand, when we know that we are eternally secure, we have the only real reason to steadfastly resist temptation—a deep sense of gratitude. Recognizing that salvation is a wonderful gift of grace that we do not deserve, we will want to please the Lord. Herein is the protective aspect of assurance.

It is said that when the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco was being constructed that many workers became overly fearful of falling due to the knowledge that typically one man died for every million dollars spent on such projects. The Golden Gate was budgeted at thirty five million dollars, meaning that nearly three-dozen men would likely lose their lives before the bridge was completed. At some point during the construction, the chief engineer, Joseph Strauss, ordered a net to be placed under the structure. The result was dramatic. The pace of construction rapidly increased. More work was done when the workers felt secure.<sup>24</sup> So it is in the Christian life. We are more highly motivated to do what we should be doing, when we realize that our salvation is secure,

Our security is based squarely on God's promises. Assurance is maintained when we fully understand what God has done for us and what he promises. Such assurance comes from exposure to God's Word wherein the promises are recorded. In 1 John 5:13 the Apostle John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know* that you have eternal life." Assurance of our salvation is possible. We can know that we are saved. We can be certain, based on God's promises, and if we are, it is of great benefit in the spiritual battle.

### **APPLY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES**

Finally, we need to access the protective power of God by applying biblical principles to each and every situation we encounter in life. Notice the latter part of verse seventeen.

#### **Specific Principle**

In the phrase "the word of God," the usual Greek term translated "word" (*logos*) does not appear. If it did, the entire "word of God" would have been meant. Instead, a less frequently used term (*rhema*) appears, which refers to the individual words that make up the text. Therefore, precise and specific principles are indicated rather than the entire Word of God. The word translated "sword" gives further confirmation of this idea. The Romans used two types of swords, and two different Greek words were used to designate them. Mounted troops used a long, heavy sword, and infantrymen carried a short sword along with their spear. In this verse, it is the word for the infantryman's short sword that appears. The infantryman's sword was about eighteen inches long, similar in size to the large Bowie knife. It was used for precise work in

hand-to-hand combat. The “sword of the Spirit” must also be used precisely in order to be effective. Again, specific biblical principles are indicated.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he quoted a specific Old Testament verse each time he was tempted by Satan (see Matthew 4: 4, 7, 10). In so doing, he was indicating the specific biblical principle or command that he was choosing to follow in contrast to what Satan suggested. The point is not that Satan is frightened by the Word of God, but that specific knowledge of God’s will contained in his Word is necessary for one’s obedience in the face of temptation. Martin Luther once said, “When I find myself assailed by temptation, I forthwith lay hold of some text of the Bible, which Jesus extends to me.” This is the idea.

A high school student whose band was performing on a Caribbean cruise was enticed to drink alcohol by some friends, but he had memorized Scripture verses from the book of Proverbs on alcohol abuse, and so he quoted it to his friends. First he said, “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise (Pro. 20:1).” Being enticed again, he said, “In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper (Pro. 23:32).” Finally, upon being accused of rejecting their company, he said, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them (Pro. 1:10).” “Leave him be,” said one of his friends, “He’s so full of Scripture we can’t do a thing with him.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, we also need to be full of Scripture.

### **Spirit Application**

Paul refers to the words of God as “the sword *of the Spirit*.” It is the Holy Spirit who wields the sword. He inspired the Word of God. It is his book, and he is our teacher, according to John 14:26. It is the Spirit who helps us understand and apply the Word of God, even though his presence and work is not always obvious. What is obvious is that we have to cooperate with the Spirit. How could any teacher be expected to teach a student that did not show up for class? Similarly, how can the Holy Spirit teach us, if we do not spend any time reading or studying the scriptures? Yet, George Barna, the social researcher, tells us that only 45 percent of American Christians read the Bible at all, and that only 12 percent of those read it daily.<sup>26</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Spiritual self-defense depends upon the armor of God. In addition to the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of peace, believers need to carry a shield of faith, wear a helmet of salvation, and arm themselves with the sword of the Spirit so that they will be able to stand against the devil’s schemes.

In Charles Allen’s book, All Things are Possible Through Prayer, he writes the following:

In Hugh Price Hughes’ story, the “City of Everywhere,” a man arrived in a city one cold morning. As he got off the train, the station was like any other station with the crowds and redcaps, except that everybody was barefooted. They wore no shoes. He noticed the cab driver was barefooted. Pardon me,” he asked the driver, “I was just wondering why you don’t wear shoes. Don’t you believe in shoes?” “Sure we do,” said the driver. “Why don’t you wear them?” “Ah, that’s the question,”

came the reply. “Why don’t we wear shoes? Why don’t we?” At the hotel it was the same. The clerk, bell-boys, everybody was bare-footed. In the coffee shop he noticed a nice-looking fellow at a table opposite him who was also barefooted. He said, “I notice you aren’t wearing any shoes. I wonder why? Don’t you know about shoes?” The man replied, “Of course I know about shoes.” “Then why don’t you wear them?” “Ah, that’s the question. Why don’t we? *Why don’t we?*”<sup>27</sup>

So, why is it that we do not always access the armor of God? We believe in it, do we not? We know about it—do we not? Why not put on the armor of God? —Why not?

## 10

### GUARD DUTY

On Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, without warning or provocation, Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor. Nineteen ships, including eight battleships, were either sunk or badly damaged, decimating the United States' Pacific Fleet. One hundred and eighty-eight American planes were destroyed. Over two thousand U. S. servicemen were killed, and more than one thousand others were wounded. Pearl Harbor was heavily armed. In addition to the naval base at Pearl Harbor, both an army air base and a naval air station were located nearby. The means to fight back was at hand, but the attack caught the U. S. completely off guard.

It is no different in the spiritual realm. Those who are caught off guard are easily defeated. We must be prepared for temptation. We must put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of peace and take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:14-17). However, all this preparation is pointless if we are not watchful. We also need to be continually alert or we will falter under the enemy's attack. Note Paul's words in the eighteenth verse of Ephesians six.

**And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Eph. 6:18)**

We need to remain alert in order to resist temptation. Having enumerated the pieces of armor that are required to defend against temptation, Paul now adds two equally important activities that the Christian soldier must practice in order to remain alert: praying continually, and watching for the enemy's approach.

### PRAYING FOR HELP

Prayer is the first essential activity that is required for us to be alert. Consider Paul's words in the first part of verse eighteen where he says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

#### Praying Continually

The activity of prayer is indicated by the present tense participle that is translated "pray." The present tense designates an ongoing activity. Whereas the Christian is called to put on his armor just once, prayer on the other hand, must be a regular discipline. The modifying phrase, "on all occasions" adds further emphasis. We should be continually praying. It is impossible to miss Paul's emphasis. Perpetual prayer is crucial in spiritual warfare. As Samuel Chadwick said, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our

wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Praying Purposefully**

Continual prayer is important, but we also need to be purposeful in our prayers. The word that is translated “prayers” is a word that is used only of prayers directed toward God. It is amazing how often we seek the help of everyone except God. Paul is not here concerned with any other type of request. It is only when we are continually dependent upon God that spiritual alertness is achieved. When we pray, we should make specific “requests” in regard to resisting temptation. The context indicates that potential temptation was what Paul had in mind. Likewise, Jesus taught his disciples to pray about potential temptations, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Matt. 6:13).” He was not implying that God would ever lead anyone into temptation. This God does not do (James 1:13). Instead, he was encouraging a specific kind of prayer request—asking for God’s help in resisting temptation, or perhaps avoiding specific temptations altogether. In general, prayer insulates the believer from sin. As Charles H. Spurgeon said, “Praying will make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying.”<sup>29</sup> Like oil and water, prayer and sin do not mix.

## **WATCHING FOR THE ENEMY**

Watchfulness is the second requirement for alertness. Notice Paul’s words in the latter half of verse eighteen, “be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

### **Watching Continually**

Just as prayer is to be a continual activity, so also we need to be continually watchful. Again, the present tense imperative participle is used. It is translated “be alert,” but literally means, “to be watching.” It is not good enough to watch for the enemy part of the time or even most of the time. Anytime the believer fails to watch, the enemy may launch an attack. In the seventh chapter of Judges, although Gideon was facing a superior number of invading Midianites, God told Gideon to allow all of those who were fearful to go home, and more than two thirds of his army departed. The Lord then tested the rest by having Gideon take them down to the water for a drink. Of the ten thousand who drank, ninety seven hundred knelt down to drink, rendering them temporarily unobservant. Three hundred brought the water up to their mouths with their hands, allowing them to be continually watchful of the enemy’s approach. These were the one’s God chose to fight the enemy.

### **Watching Steadfastly**

It is impossible to be continually watchful without determination. The prepositional phrase translated “always” in the English text more specifically means, “with all perseverance.” With this phrase Paul intended to reference our utmost devotion and determination. We have to possess unwavering determination to resist the devil and avoid sin. This is necessary because Satan is absolutely dedicated in his opposition to us. Peter emphasizes this in 1 Peter 5:8 saying, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Watchfulness cannot be achieved or maintained, if we are casual about temptation. To be watchful requires being awake and not asleep on the job. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Upon entering the garden, he posted eight disciples at the entrance, possibly as an outer guard (Mark 14:32). Taking the three inner-circle disciples—Peter, James, and John—with him into the garden, he posted them there with orders to watch while he went on a little farther to pray (vs. 34). In addition to his desire for support, in all likelihood, he did not want any of them to be taken by surprise when his enemies came. The disciples were to watch for the enemies' approach. They failed miserably, however, in their duty falling asleep three times (vs. 37-41). Being at our post is of no value if we are not carefully watching. The soon arrival of Jesus' enemies would bring Peter's greatest challenge, and so Jesus admonished him in verse thirty eight, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." Peter, however, was not prepared spiritually when the temptation came. At first he struck the High Priest's servant with his sword, and later that same night he cowardly denied the Lord three times. Both were failures that might have been prevented had he steadfastly watched for the approaching temptation.

### **Watching Collectively**

"Praying for all the saints," should also be a part of our watchfulness. We need to watch out for each other as well as for ourselves. Our intercessory prayers are usually concerned only with the physical and material needs of fellow believers. No doubt, this is because those are the type of requests we receive. It is certainly difficult for any of us to share prayer requests involving our battles with temptation. No one wants to bare dirty laundry in public. So, we freely make requests concerning our physical and material needs, but virtually ignore our spiritual struggles. Yet, we know all too well that we routinely struggle with certain temptations. With this in mind, we would do well to remember that others need our prayers in regard to temptation as badly as we do theirs—whether they are requested or not. As we read in Ecclesiastes, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up!" (Ecc. 4:9-10).

### **CONCLUSION**

In a park in downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma there is a huge anchor with a plaque attached. It is a memorial to the battleship *Oklahoma* and its crew that was sunk at Pearl Harbor. Inscribed on the plaque are the words of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Irish orator John Philpot Curran, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."<sup>30</sup> The same can be said of our standing in Christ. Eternal vigilance is the price of spiritual victory. The devil may be targeting us at this very moment. We never know when he might strike, but he will strike. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation (Mark 14:38)."

**Part Four:**

**Avoid At Risk Attitudes and Behavior**

## 11

**DANGEROUS ASSOCIATIONS**

When a rock is thrown into a lake a familiar pattern of ripples soon appear on the water—circle after circle, working their way out from the point of impact. This familiar pattern of concentric circles provides a good way to visualize the multiple relationships that exist between us and the other people in our lives. At the center of the pattern, within the innermost circle, are our closest friends, our inner circle friends. These individuals have the greatest access and the maximum influence in our lives. Obviously, we need to be careful about whom we allow to occupy this inner circle. We would do well to remember Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Bad company corrupts good character.” Filling our inner circle with those who are merely popular—without regard to their character—is dangerous. It is dangerous because it exposes us to negative, corrupting, influences. On the contrary, it is important to fill this inner circle with the appropriate kind of individuals—those who are a positive influence on us. Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” This verse provides us with some guidelines for choosing inner circle friends. An inner circle friend should be someone who loves us, loves us at all times, loves us like a brother, and does so by helping us bear adversity.

Outside our inner circle of friends are other circles, filled with friends who meet these same qualifications, but to lesser degrees. Finally, we all have an outer circle of associations. This circle does not contain people that love us or that have any kind of positive influence upon our lives. There is a lot of misunderstanding about this outermost circle. Many Christians believe that it should be unoccupied, that Christians should separate themselves entirely from sinful people in general and from non-believers in particular. Such individuals would be in agreement with the Pharisee’s of Jesus’ day who often criticized him for associating with sinners (see Luke 15:1-2). This concept is wrong. Jesus always had an outer circle of friends. It is a shame, if we do not have the same, for it will limit the number of people we can reach for Christ. So, what we need to do is limit our inner circle to a few friends who are a positive influence in our life, while expanding our outer circle to include as many as we can positively influence for Christ without allowing them the access required to negatively influence us. Consider what Proverbs 12:26 says about limiting negative influences, “A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.” As pointed as this verse is, we still need to know what kind of person it is that we should be cautious about. A scan of the entire center section of Proverbs, 10:1 through 22:16, will help. This section of Proverbs is a collection of randomly occurring precepts that can be considered topically. Examining it yields some relevant principles for choosing the kind of people that we should be in each circle. The long and the short of it is this, we need to be very careful with whom we intimately associate. Certain kinds of associations are dangerous both physically and spiritually, if allowed into our inner circle. Who are the people that need to be excluded from our inner circle? Four kinds of individuals are identified.

## HARDHEADS

The first kind of person with whom we should avoid close associations is the “hardhead.” The biblical term is the word “fool.” The Hebrew word translated “fool” references someone who is hardened against God and his wisdom. David connects foolishness to rejecting God. “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” (Psa. 14:1a) Obviously, fools should be excluded from our inner circle. The Book of Proverbs provides the specific reasons. Failing to exclude fools from our inner circle will result in harm, and fools have nothing of value to offer us.

**He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”  
(Prov. 13:20)**

**Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips.” (Prov. 14:7)**

One anonymous writer captured the essence of foolishness and its emptiness with the following comparisons. “A wise man learns from the experience of others. An ordinary man learns by his own experience. A fool learns by nobody’s experiences.<sup>31</sup> Simply put, if someone never listens to reason, exclude that person from your inner circle. Associating with a fool will be of no benefit and it will eventually result in serious harm.

## HOODLUMS

The second type of person to exclude from our inner circle is the “hoodlum” or lawbreaker. We need to avoid hoodlums in order to insulate ourselves from the pressure to travel the wrong path. Two verses from Proverbs make this clear.

**A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. (Prov. 12:26)**

**A violent man entices his neighbor and leads him down a path that is not good.  
(Prov. 16:29)**

Harold Morris was 29 years old when he was falsely accused of armed robbery. As he sat in his car, two friends robbed a convenience store at gunpoint without his knowledge. After his friends returned, Morris drove away inadvertently assisting them in their get-a-way. The guilty parties—his so-called “friends”—eventually implicated him in exchange for a reduced sentence. Harold Morris spent the next eleven years in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. After his conversion in prison and his pardon in 1981, Morris wrote Twice Pardoned, a book in which he chronicled his life and warned young people of the dangers of wrong associations.<sup>32</sup> Wrong associations can take us down the wrong path.

Such persons that should be avoided can be identified by their continual obsession with evil. They are continually planning, plotting, and talking about some evil scheme. Note Solomon’s words of advice about such individuals.

**Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble. (Prov. 24:1-2).**

Those who continually hatch plots to get ahead by breaking the rules are not just the dregs of society. According to a recent *Time* magazine article, white-collar crime costs American industry over \$40 billion per year. This is ten times the cost of street crime on a yearly basis.<sup>33</sup> Employees lie about the hours they work, steal items from their employer, make personal long distance calls from work, and find a hundred other ways to take advantage of their employers. Avoid such hoodlums at all cost.

### HOTHEADS

Another type of individual to be kept at a distance is the hothead, the person who does not control his anger. Uncontrolled anger is certainly dangerous for those who are continually on the receiving end of it. However, there is also another dangerous aspect to associating with hotheads—learning their ways. As with other types of individuals with whom we should limit our contact, their bad behavior can and will negatively influence us. We can easily become ensnared in the same behavioral trap. Note Solomon's warning.

**Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared. (Prov. 22:24-25)**

On average, fourteen men every year are killed in America by soft drink vending machines. Obviously, vending machines are not inherently dangerous, but angry customers make them so. Not receiving a drink or due change causes some overly aggressive customers to violently shake the heavy machines until they eventually tip over on them.<sup>34</sup>

Not only is uncontrolled anger dangerous, it is also a health risk. In May of 2000 the American Heart Association released the results of a study on anger in their periodical, *Circulation*. Dr. Janice Williams of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill led the study that monitored thirteen thousand adults for six years. The study concluded that a person with an anger problem was three times more likely to have a heart attack than calmer counterparts.<sup>35</sup> Learning the ways of a hothead is a dangerous proposition.

### THE HOOKED

The final type of person that should be excluded from our inner circle of friends is the hooked individual. The hooked are those that practice some form of substance abuse. We must not unduly expose ourselves to their unrestrained and undisciplined lifestyle of substance abuse. We will suffer, if we follow the abusers example. Again, Proverbs provides a warning.

**Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. (Prov. 23:20-21)**

There is a physical price to be paid for abusing alcohol, other drugs, or even food. What Will Rogers once said is still noteworthy, “We have killed more people celebrating Independence Day than we lost fighting for it.”<sup>36</sup> Although the physical price is remarkable, it is the monetary cost of substance abuse that is emphasized in the verses above. Drunkards and gluttons end up poor. They do so not so much because of the price of what they consume, but rather because substance abuse robs them of the desire to work. Eventually, they lose all interest in anything but consuming and sleeping. Doing an honest day’s work to support themselves or their families is no longer a priority. The following description is a “sobering” reminder of the danger associated with substance abuse.

Alcohol is a product of amazing versatility. It will remove stains from designer clothes. It will also remove clothes off your back. If by chance it is used in sufficient quantity, alcohol will remove furniture from the home, rugs from the floor, food from the table, lining from the stomach, vision from the eyes, and judgment from the mind. Alcohol will remove good reputations, good jobs, good friends, happiness from children’s hearts, sanity, freedom, spouses, relationships, man’s ability to adjust and live with his fellow man and even life itself. As a remover of things, alcohol has no equal.<sup>37</sup>

Among other things, poverty is the end result of substance abuse. If their habits are to be avoided, we must limit our contact with those that are hooked.

## CONCLUSION

Why is it that many people exercise more care in selecting bananas at the grocery store than they do in selecting their friends? The people with whom we associate are a crucial factor in our lives. Great care must be taken to limit our inner circle of friends to those who are a positive spiritual influence in our lives. Those who would negatively influence us must be relegated to the outer circle, where we can witness to them through limited contact rather than become a victim of their negative influence. An old English proverb is a good final reminder.

Tell me the company you keep, and I’ll tell you who you are. Tell me with whom you go and I’ll tell you what you do!

## 12

**FALSE ASSUMPTIONS**

When asked to give a fifteen-minute radio address on the topic of safe driving, a Detroit taxi driver who had logged a million miles without an accident responded, “It won’t take me any fifteen minutes to tell how to avoid accidents. It’s simple—just drive on the theory every other guy in the world is crazy.”<sup>38</sup> Certainly, assumptions can significantly impact behavior. They can make a difference, one way or the other, be it in our driving or in our spiritual life. Reasonable assumptions are generally beneficial and wrong assumptions can certainly cause harm. In the spiritual realm, harm is the result of sin, and sin can overtake us when our assumptions about temptation are wrong. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 10:12-13.

**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.  
(I Cor. 10:12-13)**

Leading up to these verses in the previous chapter, Paul discussed the importance of self-discipline in relation to spiritual success. Then in chapter ten, he sets forth some examples of specific sins that can overtake us if we are not spiritually disciplined. In that list are: lust (v. 6), idolatry (v. 7), sexual immorality (v. 8), rebellion (v. 9), and grumbling (v. 10). Having listed potential sins that threaten us in verses twelve and thirteen, Paul goes on to identify the specific underlying assumptions that can rob us of the discipline we need to avoid sin. Our failure to resist temptation and avoid sin often can be traced to the dangerous false assumptions identified in these verses. They are costly mistakes.

**OVERCONFIDENCE**

The first false assumption that we sometimes make is that we can resist every temptation that comes along. Verse twelve records such an assumption. Paul addresses the one who thinks he is standing firm. The present tense participle indicates that an ongoing thought process is involved. The assumption is obviously overconfidence—that one is standing firm against temptation. Such an assumption is problematic. Verse twelve identifies the results of such overconfidence; it leads to reduced vigilance and an eventual fall.

**Reduced Vigilance**

The command given to the overconfident is, “be careful.” The word in the original carries the idea of looking or watching and indicates the need for vigilance. A lack of vigilance can be tragic. Daredevil, Bobby Leach, of Cornwall, England miraculously survived a plunge over Niagara’s Horseshoe Falls in a steel barrel in 1911, although he spent six months in the hospital

recuperating from various fractures and other injuries. It's amazing what can be endured when it is expected and when we are prepared for it. Fourteen years later, at the age of 67, while touring New Zealand, Leach slipped on an orange peel in the street and badly fractured his leg. Complications required that his leg be amputated, but gangrene developed and Leach soon died.<sup>39</sup> All this came about because he didn't anticipate any danger in walking down that street. His failure to be vigilant led to his fall. So it is with the temptations we face. When we anticipate something, we can prepare ourselves for it. Therefore, we need to be ever careful of the danger we face (Matt. 26:41, Eph. 6:18, 1 Pet. 5:8).

### **An Eventual Fall**

The second result of overconfidence is a fall. Paul exhorts us to be careful so that we will not fall. The word "fall" can mean to fall down, or to come to ruin or destruction. In this context it is used of falling into some sin—which is certainly destructive. It is easy to become so spiritually overconfident that we do not anticipate the possibility of committing sin. When we do, we are more vulnerable than ever.

A well known Christian communicator was on a Christian campus to speak at a commencement when a school board member asked him, "If Satan were to blow you out of the water, how do you think he would do it?" "I'm not sure I know," he responded. "All sorts of ways, I suppose; but I know there's one way he wouldn't get me." "What's that?" "He'd never get me in any area of my personal relationships. That's one place where I have no doubt I'm as strong as you can get."<sup>40</sup> Several years later that Christian communicator recalled this incident and wrote about it after having faced personal failure in this very area. Overconfidence in the spiritual realm can be disastrous, leading to an eventual fall.

## **RESIGNATION**

A second false assumption involves the opposite of overconfidence. There are certain temptations that seem so powerful that we assume that we cannot resist them at all. Everyone certainly has areas of weakness. Some temptations can be much more difficult to resist than others. It is good to recognize these areas of weakness so that we can be alert and spiritually ready to resist them. However, it is not a good thing if after repeated failures we conclude that we cannot avoid certain sins. We need not run up the white flag. The assumption that we cannot resist certain kinds of sins is self-fulfilling, and it is so for two reasons: first, because there are no "unique temptations," and secondly, because divine help is always available.

### **No Unique Temptations**

The first reason why we should not resign ourselves to committing certain sins that we find difficult to resist is that our situation is not unique. It is easy to conclude that what we find difficult to resist is overpowering and that no one else has ever faced the degree of temptation we routinely face. Such a conclusion is false. Verse thirteen says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." Implied in this statement is the fact that many have successfully resisted the very temptations we have concluded are too much for us. Our temptations are never greater than what others have experienced.

Flip Wilson, the well-known comedian that hosted his own network TV show in the 70's, used to quip, "The devil made me do it." Spouted by his favorite character—Geraldine—as an excuse for outlandish behavior, it was humorous. It is not so humorous when Christians come to the same conclusion. The devil may well influence our behavior, but we need not give in to his temptations. Others have resisted and so can we.

### **Divine Help**

The second reason why we should never assume that we couldn't resist a particular temptation is the fact that we have God's help. Verse thirteen continues, "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." As we can see from this verse, God will never allow us to face a temptation that we are unable to resist. Apparently believers have a hedge of protection around them as did Job, and Satan cannot breach this barrier to tempt us unless God allows it (see Job 1:10). Furthermore, any temptation that God does allow us to endure comes with a way out provided by God. The way out, our escape route includes the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit that indwells us. The Apostle John reminds us that the one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4). In addition to the Spirit's help, we have the Word of God as our roadmap to show us the way out.

### **CONCLUSION**

We are rendered vulnerable when we are deceived. Knowing the truth exposes temptation for the lie that it is, and helps us see through the fog. (Note Jesus' use of the scriptures in resisting temptation in chapters four through six.)

Early in the Second World War, British Field Marshall Claude Auchinleck's 8<sup>th</sup> Army was up against the Desert Fox, German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel. Although Auchinleck had more troops and weaponry at his disposal than did the Germans, Rommel, due to his reputation, had an edge psychologically. This led Auchinleck to write the following order to his commanders.

There exists a real danger that our friend Rommel is becoming a king, or magician, or bogey-man to our troops, who are talking far too much about him. He is by no means a superman, although he is undoubtedly very energetic and able. Even if he were a superman, it would still be highly undesirable that our men should credit him with supernatural powers.

I wish you to dispel by all possible means the idea that Rommel represents something more than the ordinary. The more important thing now is to see that we do not always talk of Rommel when we mean the enemy in Libya. We must refer to "the Germans" or "the Axis powers" or "the enemy" and not always be harping.

Please ensure that this order is put into immediate effect, and impress upon all commanders that, from a psychological point of view, it is a matter of the highest importance.<sup>41</sup>

What we think about our enemy dictates our response to his advances, whether we fight or run, whether we resist or surrender. So, it is in the spiritual battle, we must not make the wrong assumptions. False assumptions produce a vulnerable state of mind, be it overconfidence or resignation.

## 13

**DEMORALIZING CIRCUMSTANCES**

No one ever worked harder or sacrificed more for the Lord. He was responsible for planting numerous churches in many varied fields. Yet, he never received the acclaim of men. He was, by many, unappreciated during his lifetime. In fact, he was often criticized and opposed by his own brethren, some of who were members of the very churches he established. Unbelievers constantly attacked him. He was imprisoned several times unjustly, and on more than one occasion physically abused. He often went hungry, thirsty, and without proper clothing. On top of all this, he was afflicted with poor health that often interfered with his ministry. Perhaps by now you have recognized the Apostle Paul, of whom I speak. For a catalog of his difficulties see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 and 12:7-10. Why was someone as dedicated as the Apostle Paul so afflicted? Why would God allow someone who accomplished so much for His glory to suffer so much at the same time? There is a very specific reason mentioned in scripture for his physical malady, that he would not become conceited (2 Cor. 12:7). However, in general, the answer is simply that difficulties are a normal part of the Christian life. James provides us with the specifics of this reality in the New Testament letter that bears his name. Notice that he considers difficulties or trials to be both a normal and a beneficial part of our lives as Christians.

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (Jam. 1:2-4)**

In these three verses it is assumed that trials or difficulties will be a part of our lives. James says that we should respond joyfully, “whenever we face trials of many kinds.” Trials certainly come in many different forms, including health problems, financial difficulties, and relationship issues. Each one of us could make our own list of difficulties that we have experienced. The difficulties we routinely face may be of our own making, or they may be wholly undeserved, but they are almost always present in one form or another.

Not only are difficulties a normal occurrence, but they are also beneficial. They produce something of value if they are handled properly. Exactly what that is, we will discuss later. However, if we do not realize that our difficulties are normal and beneficial, we will not profit from them. If we focus on the difficulty, and not the potential benefit of the difficulty, we will undoubtedly become angry with God for letting us suffer. After all, he could prevent difficulties from occurring and he could certainly spare us from suffering. So, why wouldn't he intervene on our behalf? Once we have reached this point in our reasoning, it is easy for us to quit on God—quit serving him, and quit obeying him. After all we reason, he let us down. So, we must understand that our difficulties are a normal and beneficial part of our life. Once we understand this truth, we can go on to respond properly to our difficulties. There are two responses James

exhorts us to make, both of which help us realize the benefit of our afflictions: he says that we are to rejoice, and to remain faithful.

## **REJOICE**

The first response to any difficulty we experience in life should be to rejoice. James says, “Consider it pure joy, my brethren, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” We must consider our trials to be joyful. Certainly, the difficulty itself is not pleasant, but we are told to rejoice in it.

### **Rejoice Deliberately**

Rejoicing in the face of trials requires a deliberate choice. It requires the exercise of our will. While experiencing unpleasant circumstances and the pain they produce, at the same time, we should choose to be joyful. This is not some silly, empty façade that we put on. It is not inexplicably rejoicing over our losses without reason. Who would praise God for being fired from their job, or because their house burned down, unless there was some good news that went along with such miseries? No one rejoices over a trial, but along with each trial there is good news—what those trials produce in our life. Rejoicing in trials requires this realization. This kind of rejoicing involves the deliberate, specific expression of thanksgiving in prayer that acknowledges the good that the trial will produce in our life, even though present circumstances are painful.

My wife is in the habit of stashing extra money into a seldom-used pocket or some unlikely place in the car or house. Over time, she often forgets about the money she has set aside for some future need or minor emergency. Then one day she will happen upon the cash and discover she has more money than she thought, bringing a smile to her face and perhaps some verbal expression of her joy. So it is with any possession. It is only when we know what we possess that we are able to rejoice in the possession. Our difficulties are never lost. They are all too obvious to us, but they must be regarded as valuable in order to be counted as a blessing. Such a perspective seems ridiculous on the surface, but not when we come to a deeper realization of what it is they produce in our lives.

### **Rejoice In Every Situation**

Not only is rejoicing in difficulty a choice of the will, it is a choice that is possible in the toughest of situations. James says that we should rejoice, “whenever we face trials of many kinds.” The idea James conveys here is one of being surrounded by problems of every kind. Picture an old west wagon train with the wagons circled and Indians attacking from every direction. This is often the situation we face. Many kinds of trials surround us. When they do, we often take a pessimistic, depressed outlook on life. Robert Orben’s words capture the mood well: “Sometimes I get the feeling the whole world is against me, but deep down I know that’s not true. Some of the smaller countries are neutral.”<sup>42</sup> By acknowledging the nature of trials, James is not painting a bleak picture in order to give us an excuse for being dejected. He is simply acknowledging the reality that we face. It is a formidable reality as Thomas Brookes observed.

God who is infinite in wisdom and matchless in goodness, hath ordered our troubles, yea, many troubles to come trooping in upon us on every side. As our mercies, so our crosses seldom come single; they usually come treading one upon the heels of another; they are like April showers, no sooner is one over but another comes.<sup>43</sup>

The point is not that such trials are overwhelming, but that they are often multiple. We need to remember that God orders all trials for our good. This truth means that we can rejoice, even in the face of multiple difficulties, not in the suffering they bring, but in what they will ultimately produce in our lives. Rejoicing is indeed possible in the toughest of situations.

### **Understanding Required**

So far, we have learned that we should rejoice in our trials and that we should do so no matter what difficulties we face. Therefore, trials must certainly be good for us in some specific way. Joy in the midst of difficulties requires a basis of understanding. We need to understand what it is that trials do for us. So, James adds, “Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” Herein lays the reason for rejoicing: the difficulties that test our faith develop perseverance. This is the truth that we need to know in order to rejoice in the face of trials. Our faith is tested by our difficulties. Now, we must understand that faith is not the assurance that every circumstance in life will be pleasurable and free of pain. True faith is not the assurance that everything will be fine in this life. Instead, faith gives us assurance that we will eventually be rewarded for our trust in God, even if it is in eternity. Trials test our faith because they require that we trust God all the way to the end of this life. Our trials can cause us to question God’s goodness, love, and mercy toward us. We must not allow this to happen. We have to keep eternity in mind. The proper perspective on life can be compared to a ball game we record and watch later, after we know that our team won. All of our play-by-play concerns are eliminated when we later watch the game knowing its final outcome. Faith tested by the play-by-play trials of life can hold firm if the final outcome of our faith is held in view. As this testing unfolds, we are provided with an opportunity to learn perseverance. The word translated “perseverance” means “to remain under a burden”. It has to do with staying power. As we are confronted with the burdens that we face in life, we learn from experience what it means to persevere in faith. A greater capacity to persevere is the result. This growing perseverance should be the focus of our joy. It is the reason we can rejoice in the face of trials. Perseverance is an important part of our Christian character, and it cannot be learned without facing difficulties. So, trials are a blessing—not because they are pleasurable to endure, but because of what they produce in our lives. If we do not understand this concept, we will not only fail to learn perseverance, but we also become vulnerable to temptation as a result of failing to understand God’s work in our lives. Once we become convinced that God isn’t treating us fairly, our bitterness toward him will lead to disobedience much like Eve in the garden, when Satan induced her to question God’s goodness (see chapter three, Gen. 3:1-6).

### **REMAIN FAITHFUL**

The second necessary response to the difficulties we face in life is to remain faithful to God. As we have noted, it is the testing of our faith that develops perseverance. Again, perseverance is the ability to remain under the burden God has placed on us. The temptation we

face is to falter under the load. Although we are powerless to lay aside our trials, we can refuse to fulfill our God-given responsibilities in reaction to them, and not persevere.

### **Be Responsible**

We must not quit serving the Lord when the going gets tough. James tells us that perseverance needs to finish its work in us. Remember, the idea behind the word translated “perseverance” is that of remaining under a burden. We must willingly accept God’s chosen burden for us, realizing that it is beneficial. We do this by remaining obedient to God in spite of the burden we carry. On one hand, we have no choice but to endure the difficulties that God allows. They come upon us. We have no say in the matter. On the other hand, we do have a choice to make. We must decide whether or not to continue obeying God, the one who brought the difficulties into our life. James urges us to make the right choice—to be faithful.

### **Become Mature**

The reason we need to persevere in the face of difficulties is because the end result is maturity. James says that perseverance needs to finish its work in us, “so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” The only way to become a mature believer is to persevere in the face of difficulties. If we want to be fully grown someday, we must remain faithful to God in the present. If we want to be whole, not lacking anything, we must persevere. If we are to be Christ-like, we must be faithful to God in difficult times.

Difficulties are a normal and beneficial part of the Christian life. They are good for us. They benefit us spiritually. Malcolm Muggeridge has expressed this truth well.

Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness.<sup>44</sup>

So, our difficulties must be accepted as normal, even welcomed as opportunities. Our testing develops perseverance, and our perseverance results in maturity. Christ-likeness is God’s purpose for us, and difficulties facilitate our growth in Christ. Our trials make us better. They increase our value to God and to other people. M. R. DeHann helps us grasp what it is that God is doing in our lives through the crucible of trials.

A bar of steel worth \$5, when made into ordinary horseshoes, is then worth \$10. If this same \$5 bar is manufactured into needles, the value rises to \$350. And yet if it’s made into delicate springs for expensive watches, it is worth more than \$250,000. The same bar of steel is made more valuable by being cut to its proper size, past through one blast furnace after another, again and again, hammered and manipulated, beaten and pounded, finished and polished until it’s ready for those delicate tasks.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, God’s work on us to make us into something better involves a process that isn’t

pleasant. We must allow ourselves to be made *better* rather than *bitter* by the process. We must persevere, and not cease to obey God because of the difficulties we face.

### **CONCLUSION**

When trials come, we need to maintain a joyful attitude and at the same time be faithful to our God-given duties. In so doing, we will insure our spiritual development and avoid yielding to temptation. We must not listen to Satan's voice. God never treats us unfairly. There is never an excuse for sin, and never a good reason for it. Eve thought there was, but she was deceived. Don't be deceived. Persevere

# CHAPTER OUTLINES

## Part One: Know the Adversary

### 1. The Adversary's Existence – 1 Pet. 5:8

Two Important Realizations:

#### A. What We Are Up Against (3 characterizations)

- 1) An adversary
- 2) A deceiver
- 3) A malicious foe

#### B. What We Need to Do (3 admonitions)

- 1) Avoid distraction
- 2) Be alert
- 3) Take a stand

### 2. The Adversary's Objective – Isa. 14:13-14

Two Insatiable Desires:

#### A. Predominance (2 aspects)

- 1) Having divine status
- 2) Being worshipped

#### B. Dominion (2 aspects)

- 1) Self determination
- 2) Universal authority

### 3. The Adversary's Tactics – Gen. 3:1-6

Three Identifiable Methods:

#### A. Subtlety (3 examples)

- 1) Slick talk
- 2) Familiar friends
- 3) Pressurized circumstances

B. Deception (2 aspects)

- 1) The denial of truth
- 2) The justification of sin

C. Enticement (3 components)

- 1) The use of bait
- 2) The appeal to desire
- 3) An undisclosed aim

**Part Two: Guard the Avenues of Temptation**

**4. Pleasure Lane (The Love of Pleasure) – Matt. 4:1-4**

Two Critical Alternatives:

A. Indiscriminate Gratification (2 Factors)

1. An unguarded moment
2. A lack of discernment

B. Abstinence (2 Guidelines)

1. Without regard to desire
2. In accord with God's will

**5. Opportunity Avenue (The Problem of Pride) – Matt. 4:5-7**

Two Critical Alternatives:

A. Self-Glorification (3 Components)

1. Public display
2. Selfish motivation
3. Making an impression

B. Humility (2 Aspects)

1. Submission to God's will
2. Concern with God's glory

## **6. Easy Street (The Danger of Materialism) – Matt. 4:8-11**

Two Critical Alternatives:

### A. Expensive Acquisitions (2 Considerations)

1. What we want
2. What it costs

### B. A Prioritized Life (2 Requirements)

1. Avoid idols
2. Serve God

## **Part Three: Access the Armor of God**

### **7. Basic Training – Eph. 6:10-13a**

Three Stages of Readiness:

#### A. Armed for Battle (2 Qualifications)

1. With God's armor
2. In advance

#### B. Informed About the Enemy (3 Observations)

1. He is powerful
2. He is a tactician
3. He is virtually omnipresent

#### C. Determined to Resist (2 Requirements)

1. A refusal to yield
2. Personal engagement

### **8. Spiritual Armor (Part 1) – Eph. 6:13b-15**

Three Essential Components:

#### A. The Acknowledgment of Truth (2 Precepts)

1. Truth is objective
2. Truth is protective

B. Doing What is Right (2 Requirements)

1. A practical obligation
2. A predetermined choice

C. The Appropriation of Peace (2 implications)

1. Peace is good news
2. Peace provides freedom from fear

**9. Spiritual Armor (Part 2) – Eph. 6:16-17**

Three Essential Components:

A. The Exercise of Faith (2 explanations)

1. Faith is trust in God
2. Temptation involves doubt

B. The Assurance of Salvation (2 explanations)

1. Salvation is certain
2. Assurance provides protection

C. The Application of Biblical Principles (2 Specifics)

1. A precise application
2. A Spiritual application

**10. Guard Duty – Eph. 6:18**

Two Important Activities:

A. Praying for Help (2 Aspects)

1. Praying continually
2. Praying purposefully

B. Watching for the Enemy (3 Aspects)

1. Watching continually
2. Watching steadfastly
3. Watching collectively

**Part Four: Avoid At Risk Attitudes and Behavior****11. Dangerous Associations – Prov. 12:26, 13:20, 14:7, 16:29, 22:24-25, 23:20-21, and 24:1-2**

Four Dangerous Associations:

- A. Hardheads
- B. Hoodlums
- C. Hotheads
- D. Hooked

**12. False Assumptions – 1 Cor. 10:12-13**

Two Costly Mistakes:

**A. Overconfidence (2 Results)**

- 1. Reduced vigilance
- 2. An eventual fall

**B. Resignation (2 Contradictions)**

- 1. No temptation is unique
- 2. We have God's help

**13. Demoralizing Circumstances – Jam. 1:2-4**

Two Necessary Responses:

**A. Rejoice (3 Methods)**

- 1. Rejoice deliberately
- 2. Rejoice in every situation
- 3. Rejoice with understanding

**B. Remain Faithful (2 Obligations)**

- 1. Be responsible
- 2. Become mature

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Chapter One**

1. Why is knowledge of an enemy so important?
2. How do we know that Satan is real?
3. How do we act as if the world is a playground rather than a battleground?
4. What is it about his character that makes Satan such a threat to us?
5. In general, what must we do to protect ourselves against Satanic attack?

### **Chapter Two**

1. What kind of things are we often tempted to place before God?
2. What does it take for Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our life?
3. Can Jesus be our Lord, if we occasionally yield to temptation?
4. Who, if anyone, benefits from our sinful behavior?

5. Why does Satan want us to sin?

### **Chapter Three**

1. How can we reduce our exposure to negative influences?

2. What are some untruths accepted by the world that we must reject?

3. What are some specific situations that can lead to temptation?

4. In what ways do we often justify our sins? Is there ever any justification for sin?

5. What kinds of “bait” does Satan use to tempt us?

### **Chapter Four**

1. How is temptation similar to a virus that enters our body? Are there any similarities in how they may be detected?

2. Since God created us with physical desires, why would he ever want us to deny any of them?

3. How can deprivation or suffering make us more vulnerable to temptation?

4. We all have physical desires. Why must we be careful about satisfying these desires?

5. What good does “fleeing from lusts” do for us? Isn’t it enough to simply recognize our lusts in order to avoid sin?

## **Chapter Five**

1. You’ve just achieved a significant goal and or perhaps received some public recognition. You are proud of your accomplishment. Is there anything wrong with this pride?
2. Is Satan directly involved in every temptation?
3. Why would Satan want us to glorify ourselves? What is wrong with self-glorification?
4. Why is it so important to submit to God’s will? Hasn’t God given us sharp minds and the ability to figure things out on our own?
5. Why is pride an important factor where God’s will is concerned?

## **Chapter Six**

1. Is there any danger in just looking at something desirable? Explain.
2. Why is it that the possession of material things may be dangerous for us?
3. Why is Satan called “the god of this world”? And who made him so?

4. What is an idol, and what makes it wrong?
5. When we recognize Satan's tactics, can we simply order Satan to depart from us (either audibly or inaudibly)?

## **Chapter Seven**

1. Is Satan always trying to destroy us, or is this just an exaggeration?
2. When we "sign on" as Christians and are placed at odds with Satan and his forces, God makes certain defenses available to us. What are these defenses and do we always make use of them?
3. What are the three means by which Satan tempt us (covered in earlier chapters)? Which one(s) of these did Satan use against Eve in the garden?
4. What other helpers does Satan use and what could be their tasks in this world?
5. In general, what is the Christian's single most important response to Satan's temptations?

## **Chapter Eight**

1. What are some ways we must prepare for the following?
  - a trip
  - a new baby
  - a specific career
2. How does Ephesians 6:14-15 teach us to take advantage of God's protective power?

3. What untruths are common to every temptation?
4. What is the difference between *practical* and *positional* righteousness?
5. How does simple every-day obedience prepare us for unexpected spiritual battles?
6. How does fear affect us as Christians in spiritual battles?

### **Chapter Nine**

1. Compare our spiritual warfare to that of the first ironclad ships used in the American civil war.
2. Does temptation involve doubting God? Explain.
3. Why does Paul tell those of us that are already believers to put on the helmet of salvation?
4. Why is it important to understand that our salvation cannot be lost after we receive it?
5. Why is the knowledge of specific scriptures beneficial in our daily battle with temptation?

### **Chapter Ten**

1. What is the principle danger of not staying spiritually alert?

2. What does it mean to “pray continually”?
3. According to Charles Spurgeon, what will prayer make you do? How so?
4. What must be the focus of our prayers in regard to temptation?
5. Why did Peter and the other disciples fail to resist temptation in the garden of Gethsemane?

## **Chapter Eleven**

1. Who should comprise our innermost circle of friends and why?
2. Why should our outermost circle of friends contain unbelievers?
3. Consider your multiple circles of friends. Perhaps you know a few who might be described as hardheads, hoodlums, hotheads, or hooked individuals. List some dangerous habits they have that you might pick up from them if you are continually exposed to them.
4. Once again considering these friends, does your innermost circle consist only of the most trustworthy people you know?
5. Are there people you know who should be moved either to your inward circles or to your outer circles depending on their ability to influence you in a positive way?

## **Chapter Twelve**

1. What are the two results of overconfidence mentioned early in this chapter?
2. Why are our temptations not unique?
3. Why is overconfidence dangerous?
4. What is the potential danger of convincing ourselves that we are powerless against some specific temptations?
5. What does God do to assure that we are not overwhelmed by any temptation?

## **Chapter Thirteen**

1. Why are trials and difficulties a normal part of the Christian life?
2. What are the two specific responses to trials that we need to make?
3. What is the appropriate way for us to express joy in our trials?
4. Describe the role of obedience in accepting God's chosen burdens for us.

## **About the Author**

Roy J. Waggoner received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Marietta College, his Master of Religious Education and Master of Divinity degrees from Temple Baptist Theological Seminary, and his Doctor of Ministry degree from Trinity Theological Seminary. He has been in the pastoral ministry since 1980 and currently pastors Fellowship Baptist Church in Willow Spring, North Carolina.

## Footnotes

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- <sup>27</sup> Morgan, 632-633
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- <sup>42</sup> Morgan, 712
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- <sup>44</sup> Swindoll, 582
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