

Section IV

The Road to Victory in Spiritual Warfare

Satan and his forces are aware that Jesus Christ has defeated them, and that there is victory over death. However, they still seek to cripple believers, to compromise the witness of believers, to make believers ineffective in their faith walk. Satan and his forces are powerful, and believers are specific targets. Satan's goal is to frustrate us and to keep us from fulfilling the purposes that God has for us.

What are Proper Methods to Resist Satan and His Forces?

The believer must maintain a positive focus, and not become distracted from the purposes that God has for us. Consider the example of Jesus. He never went looking for demons. He dealt with them only when He encountered them or they obstructed His ministry. Jesus did not become distracted from His primary mission on earth. He could have battled Satan and avoided the cross. See Matt 26:52-54; John 12:31-32. Jesus could have defeated Satan by calling down the overwhelming force of the heavenly army, but He chose instead to yield Himself to what the Father wanted. Jesus knew that His death would accomplish redemption for humanity, and this in turn would bring about Satan's defeat. Jesus built a new kingdom in which Satan had no place, rather than engage Satan in open conflict.

Believers must have a similar attitude. We must not seek opportunities to engage Satan. We won't win in that kind of direct battle. The fact is that Satan is actually pleased with believers who have a great interest in fighting his demonic forces. He knows that when believers go on a search-and-destroy mission against himself and demons, they will become distracted from their primary objectives.

According to C. S. Lewis: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall when considering the subject of demons. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. Demons themselves are equally pleased by both errors." (from Screwtape Letters)

Believers must keep their eyes focused on the lordship of Jesus. See Heb 12:1-3. Believers must not be occupied with evil; rather they are to focus on living the "normal Christian life," which means that they must live in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, please Jesus with the quality of their lifestyles, and concentrate their energies on the things that Jesus wants. Here are two of the most important behaviors that Jesus wants from us:

John 15:4-11, 16

Matthew 28:18-29

An Examination of Essential Bible Passages

These passages provide instructions to believers so they will know how to deal with the attacks of evil.

Ephesians 6:10-18

The first command is “to be strong.” This command has two parts

- 1) Believers are to “be strong in the Lord.” This is a reference to our position in and union with the Lord. If we understand our position, then we will have great faith and confidence no matter what the problems may be. We will know that nothing will affect our relationship with God.

- 2) Believers are to “be strong in the power/strength of His might.” This is a reference to the spiritual resources which are made available by the Lord. This will give believers courage in the midst of the attacks of evil and help us to “stand our ground.”

The second command (verse 11) is for the believer to put on the “full armor of God” for protection. Protection comes when believers are “enclosed in” and “covered up with” all the equipment that God provides for our well-being.

When the devil attacks, believers who are prepared will be able to “stand firm,” or “stand against” and “resist” and “oppose” whatever happens. These words are used several times in the passage.

The items that Paul describes were worn by the ordinary Roman soldier. All the items were used for protection. Even the sword was primarily used for defense, although it could also be used to kill. Paul mentions these defensive items because the responsibility of the believer is “to stand against the devil’s schemes,” and to repel any arrows or blows that the devil launches at them. The believer is not to retreat when the devil attacks.

Verse 12 describes the highly structured and organized enemy forces of evil. The Apostle informs us that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.” The enemy is an unseen spiritual force. Paul uses four words to describe the forces of evil: “rulers,” “authorities,” “powers of this dark world,” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” We do not know for sure if these words represent a hierarchy of authority or not, although the Scriptures speak of rank and degrees of power and authority in the angelic realm.

Satan is not omnipresent. He is a created being. He is one entity. Therefore it is highly unlikely that a believer will ever have to deal directly with him. On the other hand, there are apparently many, many evil spirit entities who follow Satan’s schemes and strategies. Believers must stand their ground and not give in to any of these evil spirit entities.

The study of James 3:13 — 4:10 is especially valuable.

This passage deals with all three dimensions of the human sin problem: the flesh, the world, and evil supernaturalism. The passage goes through the steps toward victory in appropriate sequential order. The passage contains the foundational counseling principles needed to use with all believers who are struggling in their spiritual lives.

Sin comes from within. Of all the lists of the sins of the flesh, the most complete list is Gal 5:19-21a (described elsewhere in this manual). The believer must examine his/her life and seek to identify any activities of the flesh (moral sins, spiritual sins, and social sins) which may exist. Where there is sin, it must be confessed and rejected. The believer should claim the cleansing of the blood of Christ, and recommit himself/herself to the lordship of Christ. There should be increased dependence on the indwelling Holy Spirit for a life of holiness.

Detailed outline of James 3:13 – 4:10

Note the two kinds of wisdom which are described in 3:13-18. The wisdom in 3:14-16 is “evil wisdom.” “Heavenly wisdom” is described in verse 17.

The passage begins with a description of fractured interpersonal relationships (social sins).

3:14 Bitter envy (“bitterness” + “jealousy”) can be against God, circumstances, others, even ourselves.

3:14 Selfish ambition (“selfishness” + self-centered desires).

3:14 Boastfulness (“arrogance”).

3:14 Denial of truth (“self deception”)

Note: Pride is the source of the preceding characteristics.

3:15 This “evil wisdom” ... “is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.”

The results of the characteristics in 3:14 are in verse 16

3:16 “disorder” This means that God’s order is violated. “Disorder” is associated with confusion and lack of peace and harmony. Tension, hurt feelings, and broken relationships are the result.

3:16 “every evil thing” Prideful attitudes can open the door to all kinds of potential sin.

The flesh life is described in 4:1-3

4:1-3 In the area of interpersonal conflicts, there are “quarrels” (mentioned two times), “conflicts,” “hatreds,” and “envy.” There is even fighting and killing, all because of selfish and covetous desires.

4:2-3 The activity of the flesh prevents believers from asking God for help, or when they do ask, they ask with wrong motives. In any case personal prayers are ineffective.

4:3 The “pleasures” mentioned at the end of v3 may mean that the person has a perverse pleasure in being angry. Sometimes anger (indignation) dominates the attitude of the person. When this happens, anger becomes more important to people than feeling good about their relationship with God.

The relationship of the believer with the world is discussed in 4:4-6. The “world” represents a value system which exerts a lot of influence over people. (See I John 2:15-17)

4:4 The believer who gets too close to the world commits “spiritual adultery,” and spiritual unfaithfulness brings hostility between the believer and God.

4:5 God loves us with a jealous love, and His Spirit is deeply hurt when we let the world dominate our affections.

4:6 declares that God’s grace is greater than any problem or pressure that comes our way. The key is to be humble. See 3:17-18. If we think that we deserve and merit God’s grace, we will not receive it. The pride of life is the barrier to receiving God’s grace. Pride was the snare for Satan. Pride is the snare in which Satan seeks to trap believers.

God’s expectations of believers, and what He will do for them, is explained in 4:7-10

4:7 Command: “Submit to God” (cf Romans 12:1-2; 6:13; I Corinthians 6:19-20)

Command: “Resist the devil” (cf I Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:16-17).

Remember how Jesus resisted the devil.

Promise: The devil “will flee from you”

4:8 Command: “Draw near to God”

Promise: “He will draw near to you”

Command: “Wash your hands” and “purify your hearts.” These two commands indicate that there must be a change of attitude and behavior; a spiritual cleansing.

4:9 Command: “Grieve, mourn, and wail.” These terms represent “sorrow” for improper behavior.

Command: “Change your laughter to mourning” and “Your joy to gloom.” These phrases have a similar meaning to “grieve, mourn, and wail,” but the word “change” implies the need “to repent.” Repentance means to change the direction; to stop doing what is wrong and start doing what is correct.

4:10 Command: “Humble yourselves before the Lord.”

Promise: The Lord will lift you up.” (cf Matthew 23:12)

Study of I Peter chapter 1

In this letter Peter gives a lot of specific instructions concerning the attitude and behavior of believers. The basis of these instructions is verses 3-9 which explain the position of believers. God the Father has given believers “new birth into 1) a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” and 2) an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.” This inheritance is “kept in heaven ... by God’s power until the ... salvation” that will “be revealed in the last time.” Peter wants these words to be encouragement to his readers, especially since he will state in verses 6-7 that these readers may have to “suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” In view of the trials, Peter has some specific instructions.

I Peter 1:13 “Prepare your minds for action.”

“Be self-controlled.”

1:14 “Set your hope fully on the grace to be given to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

“Do not conform to the evil desires” you had before you became a believer.

1:15 “Be holy in all you do”

1:17 “Live your lives” here on earth “in reverent fear.”

1:22 “Love one another deeply, from the heart.”

2:1 “Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”

The middle portion of I Peter, from 2:10 to 3:22, has practical advice concerning relationships. He returns to the theme of attitude and behavior in 4:1.

4:1 In regard to suffering adopt the same attitude that Christ had.

4:7 Be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”

4:8 Love each other deeply.”

4:9 “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

4:10 “Use the gift you have received to serve others.”

5:5 Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.”

5:6 “Humble yourselves.”

5:7 “Cast all your anxiety on God.”

5:8 “Be self-controlled and alert.”

5:9 “Resist the devil, standing firm in the faith.”

Ephesians 1:15 – 2:10

At the present time, Christ is seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places (cf Hebrews 10:11-14; Philippians 2:9). His position is far above any spiritual beings or authorities that we can imagine. The list in verse 21 (“rule and authority, power and dominion”) is not intended to be either complete or ranked. The point is that there are no angelic or demonic entities who are higher than Christ. To ensure that nothing is omitted, Paul states that Christ is above “every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

“All things are under His feet.” Christ is also the “head over everything for the church.” Concerning the church, Christ “fills everything in every way.” These verses in chapter 1 prepare us for the information in chapter 2.

Jump to 2:5. “God ... made us alive with Christ ... and (v6) raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms.” In other words, believers are seated (literally “enthroned”) with Christ at the right hand of God, and thus our position is also far above all existing powers and authorities. This is not to be understood in a physical sense. Rather, it is a picture of our privilege, honor, identification, and participation in Christ’s position.

We are able to live the Spirit-filled life of Christ no matter our circumstances (remember 1:17). Just as the purposes of God were worked out in Jesus Christ, verse 10 explains that we have been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” These are works “which God prepared in advance for us to do.” In other words, we were created for and then saved by grace for a specific purpose.

A Quick Summary of What the Believer Must Do

Flee circumstances that lead to temptation

I Corinthians 6:18

I Timothy 6:11-12

II Timothy 2:22

Resist the enemy when temptation is happening

Ephesians 4:27

Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14

James 4:7

I Peter 5:9

General Concluding Comments

Demons will hunt for believers because they intensely hate the people who expose their deceptions, challenge their power, and have the authority to expel them through the name of the Lord Jesus. Demons can be a wearisome nuisance for believers, just as they were for Jesus and His disciples.

Some principles to keep in mind:

Evil is always the perversion of something good. God created everything “very good.”

Satan is a perverter, not a creator. He perverts things which already exist. In effect, Satan steals God’s design and perverts it to suit his own evil purposes.

The Lord Jesus, as a man, proved that a human could have power over the devil. He was sinless and obedient, “always doing those things which pleased the Father.” Jesus depended on the Father to provide the spiritual power He needed to live on earth, and the Father worked through Jesus to deliver many men, women and children who were demonized and healed many people who were suffering from disease and illnesses. See Matt 12:22-29; Mark 1:21-28; Acts 10:38. The Lord, in turn, empowered His disciples to have authority over Satan. See Luke 9:1-2; 10:17-19; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 16:16-18; II Corinthians 4:5-7; II Corinthians 5:18-20. The followers of Jesus have authority “in the name of Jesus.”

The spiritual enemy of believers is a powerful, supernatural foe, but God, on behalf of believers, has already totally defeated Satan and his demonic hosts. Through their union with the Lord Jesus Christ, believers share in the benefits of His victory over Satan. Believers must live and act in accordance with the reality of the victory. The lies of Satan must be rejected (John 8:44). Obedience to God’s Word is the key to continual victory (James 4:1-8).