

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

Lesson 17

The World, The Flesh & The Devil

INTRODUCTION

[TEACHER: you may use the following story in the 3rd person or you can share a story from your own background that illustrates the point]

For 17 seasons I coached baseball - the first 10 as a dad; the last 7 as a high school baseball coach. Needless to say, I have many life illustrations from coaching kids. One which I will use for this lesson has to do with teaching a boy how to play catcher. The catcher has gear that no other player wears: helmet, mask, throat guard, chest protector and shin guards. The gear must be worn in order to protect the player from things like a fastball coming at him at 80+ mph, foul tips, balls thrown in the dirt, etc. A boy just learning how to play catcher will invariably make the same mistake when a ball skips in the dirt front of him: he will flinch and turn his head away. It's the natural instinct because he doesn't want to get hit in the face by the ball. We as coaches would always remind him: all of the protection is on the front of your body; if you turn your head away or turn your back, you'll get hit in an unprotected area. If a ball skips in the dirt in front of you, hold your ground and let your equipment do what it is designed to do - protect you.

In the Christian life, we have been issued protective equipment: our salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, faith, truth, our integrity, etc. In Ephesians 6:10-17 it is called the "full armor of God". Now, why do we need this gear? Because we are in a battle and our enemies are spiritual not physical.

As believers we are called to a battlefield, not a playground or a country club. In the last 2 lessons we have looked at how sin entered the world and the nature & character of sin. In today's lesson we will look at how sin affects our lives in the form of our 3 enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil - the "unholy trinity". Since we are in a spiritual battle everyday of our Christian lives, then victory begins with an understanding of our enemy.

Avery Willis states, "We are in a spiritual battle with the kingdom of darkness. We live behind enemy lines, and we face the forces of Satan." (*MasterLife Book 3 The Disciple's Victory*, page 9)

Phrases like "kingdom of darkness" and "forces of Satan" can creep us out. There are 2 extremes which we need to avoid: (1) to become fascinated with Satan and the forces of evil to the point that we feel like everything negative that happens to us is caused by Satan, that is, demons are behind every tree. (2) to ignore any teachings on Satan and evil forces as if they do not exist. Either of these extremes is unbiblical and can lead to defeat/disaster.

One more point of introduction: as we study our 3 enemies, remember that they overlap, they work as a team with Satan being the quarterback calling the plays. As 2 Corinthians 2:11 says, "...in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes." So, what are his schemes?

I. THE WORLD

The key Scripture for the world is 1 John 2:15-17 (read). Let's anticipate a question here: we live, work, play and raise our kids in the world. What are we supposed to do, go live in a commune on a mountain and divorce ourselves completely from any contact with the outside world? No. Let's define the term "world" biblically. As the term is used in 1 John and other passages it means an organized system in opposition and rebellion against God. Notice how John refers to the world in verse 16: "...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life...". He clearly says that these things are not from the Father; they work against our relationship with the Lord. What are some examples?

- **Lust of the flesh**: sinful longings for physical pleasure like sexual sin, alcohol, drugs, gluttony, etc. By the way, gluttony (overeating) can be the "accepted" sin among Christians. Food can become a drug.
- **Lust of the eyes**: where the sinful longings entice us through what we see – pornography, materialism, "bling", etc. Material things could be clothes, cars, houses, boats, electronics, media, and on & on. Are material things wrong in and of themselves? No, we have to use material things to function in this world. But, a worldly attitude says that I must have the top of the line, most advanced car or gadget or house or I am just not happy – I'm never satisfied. A worldly person covets possessions.
- **The boastful pride of life**: As Mark Driscoll states in his book *Doctrine*, "The world is where pride in possessions is commended, and haughty selfish ambition is considered a virtue rather than a vice."(page 159) That pretty much says it all!
- **The world is passing away**. The things of this world are temporary. Whatever you must have; whatever you crave, as soon as you get it...it starts depreciating. It doesn't satisfy the way you thought it would – the joy is fleeting.

What is our response? How is the Christian to gain victory over the world? Three ways...

- 1 John 2:15 – we are not to love the world nor the things in the world. We must continually guard ourselves from falling in love and obsessing over the world and what it offers – passions, pleasures, etc. James 4:4 says "...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."
APPLICATION: How does this work? Are we not to have nice things? Drive a clunker? Wear hand-me-down clothes? Live in a dump? Give all of our money to missions? No, not necessarily. Here can be the problem – we can become proud that we live a Spartan lifestyle and pride is a sin! Trust the Lord, be thankful for what you have, enjoy material things but don't obsess over them and live to glorify the Lord.
- Romans 12:2 – do not let the world shape your values. Our value system is governed by God's word, first and foremost. God's word is part of our protective equipment. Evaluate yourself using Scripture not the world's standards. We are to seek to convert the world not vice-versa.
- Galatians 6:14 – brag about the cross of Jesus Christ and consider yourself as dead to the world's temptations. Yes, those temptations from the world are real; they are attractive; they

entice us to sin or else they wouldn't be tempting. But remember, as a believer you **do not have to give in!** We are never put in a position in which we have to sin.

II. **THE FLESH**

The Bible uses the term *flesh* in 2 ways. One means our physical body – skin, bones, muscle, etc. In John 1:14 it says that “...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”. The Word is Jesus Christ; when it says that He became flesh it means that He became a man, a human being with a physical body. Even though some temptations and sins are manifested thru our physical body, this use of the word is not what we mean in this lesson.

As an enemy and a tool of Satan, the *flesh* refers to our sin nature. A believer in Jesus Christ is saved, forgiven and on his way to heaven. However, he still retains the sin nature – a bent to sin. Driscoll describes the flesh in this way: “...our fallen internal resistance to obey God and put self-interests above God's interests.”(*Doctrine*, page 160)

The main Scripture for the flesh is Galatians 5:16-21(read). Not a pretty picture! Now, 2 things to keep in mind about the flesh...

- 1) The flesh will always be with us; we will struggle with it until we go to be with the Lord.
- 2) The flesh never gets any better; we don't reform the flesh. It never wants to do the right and godly thing. No matter how long you have been a believer, no matter how much you have studied God's word, the flesh never gets any better. There will never be a time in which you can put your Christian life on auto pilot or cruise control. If you do, you have already started the downward spiral into sin. We must constantly be on our guard.

What is our response? How can we gain victory over the flesh? Three ways...

- Galatians 5:16 – “...walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” Notice that it does NOT say that the desire goes away; it says that you will not **carry it out** if...you walk by the Spirit. The desire is the temptation, which is not a sin – Jesus was tempted. Every believer in Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit indwelling him; we will study the Holy Spirit in the next 3 lessons. The Holy Spirit is part of our protective gear. To “walk by the Spirit” means to live our lives in dependence upon Him. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to say no to the flesh and yes to God.
- Romans 6:6, 11-13 – This chapter talks about the fact that as believers we are no longer slaves to sin, that is, when we are tempted (and we will be) we never **have** to sin. Realize that you can choose to resist sin and obey God! Romans 8:12 says that we are not under obligation to live according to the flesh. See also 1 Corinthians 10:13 on the point of resisting temptation.
- Romans 13:13-14 – Verse 13 mentions deeds of the flesh; verse 14 gives the solution in 2 parts – a positive and a negative. First, “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ which means to conduct yourself as one who has committed himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you put on a garment it is what people see. If you put on Jesus Christ people should see Christlike behavior. The negative command is to make no provision for the flesh, that is, do not be thinking and planning how to gratify your fleshly desires.

REVIEW: That covers the 2 main schemes of the devil – the world and the flesh. Now, let us deal with him directly...

III. THE DEVIL

This is the quarterback who calls the plays of the “unholy trinity”. We looked at him in Lesson 15 as the tempter in the Garden of Eden. There are 2 extremes in dealing with Satan: (1) to picture him in a red suit, horns, a tail and pitchfork. This view believes that he exists but he is more of a cartoon character who we can laugh at and dismiss because he is relatively harmless. (2) to be deathly afraid of Satan, to believe he is behind every negative thing – every cold, every ailment, every weakness we may have. It includes blaming all of our ills, temptations and sins on him – “the devil made me do it”. Both extremes are unbiblical and can lead to disaster.

In this lesson we cannot do an exhaustive study of Satan. Our main Scripture is 1 Peter 5:8 (read). It pictures Satan as a roaring lion. Why does a lion roar? Because he is hungry and to scare his prey. According to the Smithsonian *Zoogoer* Website(May, June 1997), a lion’s roar can be heard up to 5 miles away – talk about scary!

Peter calls the devil “our adversary” – he is not our friend! We are not to negotiate with him.

He is characterized as being on the prowl. He is actively seeking victims.

What does he want to do? He wants to “devour” us. He is not harmless. We as believers are his prey and his goals are to compromise our influence in the world, to cause us to live fruitless lives and ultimately to kill us.

In John 8:44 Jesus calls him “a murderer” and “a liar”.

He is subtle and crafty, as we saw in Lesson 15 with how he enticed Eve to sin. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 Paul describes false teachers who are deceitful and disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. He then says, “...even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” Paul also describes the false teachers as Satan’s servants. Satan deceives and hides his true agenda. As to the 2 extremes mentioned above: Satan would love for us to view him as a harmless cartoon character.

Satan is called the “great dragon”, “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” in Revelation 12:9. In verse 10 he is called “the accuser of our brethren”. One of his tactics is to accuse us, make us feel guilty and discourage us. In fact, one of his most powerful tools is discouragement.

What is our response? How can we gain victory over Satan? Jesus gives us the perfect example of how to respond to Satan in Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus went one-on-one, mano-a-mano, face to face with Satan. What did He do? Did He argue using logic? No – Jesus quoted Scripture. Three times Satan tempted Him and all three times Jesus said “It is written...” and then quoted specific Scriptures from Deuteronomy: 8:3, 6:16 and 6:13. This is amazing! Jesus - God in human flesh- used the same Scriptures that we can use! Jesus used the same protective equipment available to us: “...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”(Ephesians 6:17) This is the best way to defeat Satan: to read, study and memorize God’s word. God uses His word to transform us, correct us and keep us on the right track (2 Timothy 3:16)

If Satan is the great dragon then Jesus is the great dragon slayer!

CONCLUSION

As believers in Jesus Christ we are in the midst of spiritual warfare. We have looked at our enemy – the unholy trinity of the world, the flesh and the devil. We have been issued our protective equipment (Ephesians 6:14-17) with which to engage in spiritual warfare...

- Truth
- Breastplate of Righteousness
- Preparation of the Gospel of peace
- Shield of faith
- Helmet of salvation
- The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT AND KEEP THE FAITH! OUR SIDE WILL WIN!