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a resource in:

Spiritual Growth

Overcoming Temptation

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Overcoming Temptation

The Armor of God

The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians how important it is that we put on the armor of God. He mentions specifically that we should wear a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, and have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Next he says,

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” (Ephesians 6:16)

The words “Above all” are not to be thought of as “more importantly,” but rather “in addition to” or “overall.” Paul was very specific when he talked about this shield of faith in describing just what it could do for the one holding it.

The Original Shield

If we were to travel back in history and look at the original, we would discover that it wasn't a round, metal shield that a gladiator or someone alone might carry. Rather it was a large, oblong, four-cornered shield, probably covered with leather or animal hide. Actually, the Greek word translated “shield” is *thureos* and is closely related to the word translated as “door.” Everything the soldiers did and wore was intended to work together. And as they worked in ranks and had their sandals equipped, they also at times would go out and stand in tight formation with these shields. Can you imagine shields like doors, side by side? And can you imagine a large soldier planted behind each “door” with spiked sandals planted in the ground? It would make a truly formidable wall. But this shield, as any piece of armor or armament, has a weak point. Because of its size, it couldn't be made out of metal or other heavy material; so often it would be made with animal hide or leather stretched over a wooden frame. And both the soldier behind the shield and the enemy in front of it knew about its weakness.

Fiery Darts

The Apostle Paul says that the shield of faith “*shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*” Fiery darts – how much damage could they do against these shields? Quite a bit! You see, a shield with a wooden frame that has a covering of leather or hide would have a weakness: it could burn. You can just imagine how the enemy would try to take advantage of that. Now if some exposed part of a soldier's body were hit with an arrow, the damage would be severe, whether or not it was on fire. But that wasn't their purpose. Fiery darts were not used as much for the damage they would cause to flesh, but for the damage they would cause if they landed on or near something flammable. Fiery darts were meant to destroy the wooden shields.

The Shield of Faith

But the shield spoken of by the Apostle Paul is different. This is a shield of faith, and it has a very important characteristic that allows it to protect against fiery darts – it can extinguish them. Soldiers going into battle, knowing that they might face fiery darts, would simply wet down their shields before facing the enemy. When we think of our shield of faith, what is it that represents “moisture” in a spiritual sense, that when added to our faith, is able to put out the fiery darts of our spiritual enemy?

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Could it be the precious blood of Christ that freely flowed there at Calvary to cover us (*Hebrews 9:14*)? Could it be the living water -- a living fountain springing up within us -- that Jesus described to the woman at the well (*John 4:14*)? What about Christ loving us and washing us with the Word, that we might be sanctified and cleansed (*Ephesians 5:26*)? Are those possibilities? We may not know specifically, but we do know that God's promise is that the shield of faith is "able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Going back to the Greek, the word "all" means "all, each, every, any." What a promise! This shield covers every corner, so we don't have to worry about moving it or positioning it. This shield truly affords protection with its ability to put out all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

When we think of faith, we are reminded of a simple description from Hebrews,

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

Could we also say that faith is taking God at His Word, and taking His Word to heart as if God were speaking directly to us? Then faith becomes a shield, rooted in what He has said. And just as the soldier's shield was specially prepared to quench an arrow that had been dipped in pitch and set on fire, likewise our shield of faith is designed to quench all temptations of the enemy of our faith. What is Satan's intention when he launches fiery darts at us? Obviously his desire is to do as much damage as possible: first he wants to destroy our shield of faith, and finally us.

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Now let's start linking all this together by studying the word "overcome." It occurs in six different books in the New Testament, three of them written by one author -- the Apostle John. And the word "overcometh" occurs in two books in the New Testament, both written by the Apostle John. He defines this word in his first general epistle, where he writes,

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." (1 John 5:4-5)

Well, is it any wonder that Satan wants to destroy our faith? Is it any wonder that he wants to destroy us by destroying our shield of faith? Think for a moment about the sources of temptation. When we talk about a spiritual battle, aren't we really talking about the evil one? And doesn't he really know us and the world in which we live?

Our Adversary

As we put on spiritual armor to meet the enemy in spiritual warfare, we need to be conscious of several things that work together in concert. First, we are very conscious of Satan. He's been at it from the beginning. He was there in the garden with Adam and Eve. He was there in the desert, tempting the Lord. We are told to resist him -- Peter says it so well, when he writes,

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom [meaning Satan] resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

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Remember that last part about common afflictions, as we will get to that later. Satan is clearly an enemy and we are told not to be ignorant of his devices. We're told at times to take certain precautions so as to avoid temptation. For example, in *1 Corinthians 7*, husbands and wives are told to come together and not allow him to tempt them. He is also conscious of the world in which we live, but we read in *1 John* that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Second, we must be conscious of a world system around us that we are told not to be conformed to, but instead be transformed by the renewing of our mind. And nothing renews our minds more than what God has said, because God reveals Himself through His Word. So we have a tenacious enemy and a world system that we are to resist, and the most insidious fact of all is that Satan knows us. In *1 John* we are told that enmity of the world is what God desires,

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John 2:16)

So in a sense, we find ourselves declaring war on Satan and on a world system that would force us into its mold and desire us to be molded to it. We also find ourselves needing to declare war on our own flesh. James says in Chapter 1,

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." (James 1:13-14)

Paul uses descriptive terms like "mortify" and Peter even uses the term "war." And more than that, it's not something on the surface. It's not in our hair or we'd get a haircut. It's not on our skin or we'd somehow scrub it off. Jesus tried to explain the source of defilement to His disciples, because they were in a world that was so concerned about what they took in and how their environment would affect them. But Jesus said,

"That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-22)

So the enemy is within, the enemy is without, and the enemy is all around.

Good News

But there is good news: when it comes to overcoming temptation, Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Remember how Peter mentioned the commonality of afflictions? Paul is saying the same thing -- it's a common struggle. We are not out there alone. As believers in a spiritual battle, we stand next to each other, and our four-cornered shields of faith are set side by side. As such, we make a formidable defense, especially since we stand by faith.

You know, we've talked about faith, and we've taken for granted what our faith is in, and what it is focused on; but we need to stop and say it. As it says in Proverbs,

"Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." (Proverbs 25:19)

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It's trusting a limb that is going to let you down. It's hanging from a rope that you are not sure will hold your weight. But we discover here that our faith is not in that which is not trustworthy, but instead it is in God. When facing temptation that is "common to man," God is faithful. Not only is He faithful, He is engaged. He knows the load limit. He remembers our frame.

"[He] will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able [to bear]; but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Fighting Lies with the Truth

But remember the battle -- evil comes from within; the battle is in the mind. We can't wait until the obvious. By faith, we have to declare war on that which springs up from within. Starting with Satan, we need to recognize that his lies are consistent and pervasive. He's the father of lies, and he's been at it from the very beginning. He asked Eve, "What has God said?" He didn't really care what God had said; he just wanted to know what Eve thought God had said, so he could tell her that it was a lie. And what other lies has Satan told? Romans Chapter 8 is a great passage to read, when we think of Satan's lies and how the Word has power to expose them. Paul wrote to the Romans,

"If God be for us, who can be against us." (Romans 8:31)

Satan says God is not for you. The truth is,

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

Satan says you're condemned -- you're accused -- even though you think you're elect. But God says,

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." (Romans 8:33)

Satan says you deserve to die -- you have no peace with God. But God's Word says,

"It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Romans 8:34)

Satan says he'll get between you and God, but "it is written,"

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35)

Satan says you have reasons to fear, but the truth is,

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:36-37)

When we hear Satan's lies, we have to answer with God's truth. There is no better weapon when it comes to doing battle with the flesh. Several places in his letters to Timothy, Paul writes about the world system and warns him about negative peer pressure:

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“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things.” (1 Timothy 6:9-11)

Sometimes Fleeing Is an Option

Fleeing is a viable option, especially when two or three of our enemies come together. God has given us various appetites, and Satan is well aware of them. And when those appetites are united with Satan’s temptations and what the world has to offer, it’s time to flee. Paul told Timothy to *“flee also youthful lusts”* (2 Timothy 2:22). Another example is Joseph in the Old Testament. He was a man of God, an upright man whom God blessed in all that he did. He was also a good-looking young man, and Potiphar’s wife noticed it. The Word says that there came a day when they were alone together,

“... and there was none of the men of the house there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me.” (Genesis 39:11-12)

And Joseph fled. We’re not told exactly why he fled -- perhaps because he was alone, or because she was more forceful this time, or maybe because he recognized that he could not trust his own flesh in the presence of the world in which he found himself. So we see that fleeing is an option. Sometimes we have to look at kind of a replacement practice.

“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” (Ephesians 4:28)

“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.” (Ephesians 4:25)

We’ve got to work with our hands, so let’s labor. We’ll be speaking, so let’s make sure it’s the truth. Think of it as kind of a replacement concept. The Apostle Paul used that idea when he wrote,

“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves . . . as instruments of righteousness unto God.” (Romans 6:13)

Sometimes Fleeing Is Not an Option

Sometimes, though, fleeing isn’t really an option. Sometimes the way of escape is through the temptation. We specifically recall the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar thinks they don’t understand; surely there’s something about his plan that they’ve missed. He’s so excited about the prophecy of a golden image that was laid out by Daniel, that he’s not satisfied with a gold head. So he has a whole golden image erected and commands everyone to bow down and worship the image. We don’t know where Daniel is, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow. The king assumes that they don’t understand, so he recounts the situation to them and then asks, “Now is it true?” And before they have a chance to answer, he continues to lay out the whole process: when they hear the music, they must bow down and worship the image, because there’s a fiery furnace on the other side. He challenges them with his last thought,

“And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (Daniel 3:15)

Their response is priceless. When he finally stops talking and gives them his attention, they tell him:

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“O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.” (Daniel 3:16)

“We don’t need time to think about it: you misunderstand us.”

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.” (Daniel 3:17)

“When this is all over, King, you won’t have us, be it through the fire or be it on the other side.”

“But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (Daniel 3:18)

But like a child who doesn’t get what he wants, King Nebuchadnezzar gets real mad. He commands the fire to be made seven times hotter than it was accustomed to be -- so hot that it kills the guards who bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them down into the fiery furnace. But when the king looks into the furnace, he sees not three but four men, walking in the midst of the fire.

Walking! You see, the only things they lost as they passed through their trial were the ropes that bound them. Do you think anybody could ever scare Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego again with a fiery furnace? Was that ever a threat again? There may be temptations, tests, and trials that God desires we pass through at times, but throughout them all He is watching. He knows our frame. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we’re able to bear. He watches as we endure, because

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he will receive the crown of life.” (James 1:12)

God watches so that He might reward. He’s watching. He has his eye on us, but sometimes the way of escape is through the temptation or trial, and we face that with the same shield of faith.

Temptations Multiplied

But let’s also consider another possible outcome: what if we don’t take the first way of escape? Well, what often happens is we find another temptation hot on its trail, following right on the heels of the first one. The story of David and Bathsheba immediately comes to mind. The Scriptures say that it was a time of war, a time when kings were supposed to go out to battle. Now we really don’t know exactly why David is in the castle, whether it’s for a right reason or a wrong reason. But it happens one evening, as he rises from his bed and walks on the roof of his house, that he sees *“a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon”* (2 Samuel 11:2). He sees and looks. And we know what the difference is, especially us men. It’s one thing to see, it’s another thing to look. But there’s a way of escape. David asks who she is, and he’s told she’s the wife of Uriah. And we want to say, “Flee David, that’s a way of escape! She’s not yours, she belongs to another.” But then the Word says, *“David sent messengers, and took her”* (2 Samuel 11:4). And we say again, “Flee David, there’s another way of escape!” But he doesn’t, and they have sexual relations and she goes home. Soon she sends David a message, “I’m pregnant.” David, tell the truth! There’s another way out. He invites her husband back from the front line, tries to deceive him, and even hopes to make him drunk so that he can be with his wife to make it appear that the child is his. Flee, David! Just tell the truth! There’s a way of escape! But David’s plan doesn’t work -- Uriah is more honorable than David. He will not allow himself to spend time with his wife while his armies are engaged in battle. So Uriah goes back to the front line with his own death warrant. Flee, David, there’s yet another way of escape! And still there’s silence.

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The Temptation of Silence

Did he ever escape? David may have been recalling this very time of temptation when he wrote this passage in *Psalms* 32,

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” (Psalm 32:3-4)

Oh, so often there is another temptation right behind the one we failed -- the temptation of silence.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” (1 John 1:7)

Remember we stand together with our shields of faith side by side. May our fellowship be sweet, but may it also be honest. May we bring to light anything that would hide in darkness. May we talk about those things which would tempt us, providing an environment where we can be open with one another. May we be those who would hear one another and weep with one another, but yet recognize the seriousness of what may seem to be the smallest of sins.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

Oh, the temptation to cover our sin is right behind every temptation. We're not done. The battle isn't over. And if we fail, what do we do then? We do the same thing -- we take our covering behind the shield of faith. As John wrote to believers,

“My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

In Summary, Let's Hold Fast

There is great comfort and encouragement in the words of the hymn, “Does Jesus Care,”

“Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed to resist some temptation strong?
When for my deep grief there is no relief, tho' my tears flow all the night long?
Oh yes, He cares, I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief.
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares.”

Frank E. Graeff

But can we really count on that? The answer comes from Hebrews,

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour [come to the aid of] them that are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:17-18)

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So He invites us,

*“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”
(Hebrews 4:14)*

Let us hold fast our faith. May that shield always remain erect:

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

So,

*“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”
(Hebrews 4:16)*

Loved ones all, let's be encouraged!