

CHAPTER SIX

SOME THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR BATTLE

I usually skim newspaper articles...but not this one. I was grimacing before I was halfway through. If there hadn't been a photograph with the article, I would have had a hard time believing it.

(I should warn you. The next few paragraphs are not for the squeamish. Read at your own discretion....)

On July 20, 1993, Donald "Butch" Wyman was cutting timber in a remote area 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. Suddenly the tree he was cutting fell on him, crushing his lower left leg and driving his foot into the ground. He was pinned. Moving the 30-inch thick trunk was impossible. And Butch was scared he would bleed to death if he waited for someone to find him.

He had only two options: either do the unthinkable, or die where he lay. Butch looked at his trapped leg one last time. Then, taking his pocket knife in hand, he cut his way through the mangled skin, muscle, nerves, and shattered bone of his leg. It only took 30 seconds, Butch told *USA Today*, "but even 30 seconds was too long."

Butch dragged himself up a hill to a nearby bulldozer, climbed in the cab, then drove to his truck and on to a nearby farmhouse. The photo accompanying the article showed Butch in a hospital bed, smiling and showing off his bandaged stump. Smiling? How could he be smiling? Because amputation was a lot better than death. As he told the reporter, "I have so much to live for that I did the only thing I could—chose life."¹

I share this gruesome story for a reason. It tells the price one man had to pay to survive. Butch had no time to be passive or patient. If he ever hoped to see his family and friends again, he knew he had to act decisively. And so, when his own leg threatened to be the instrument of his death, he took radical action against it.

Living a victorious Christian life also requires radical action. You won't go to the extremes Butch Wyman did, but don't think you can take a laissez-faire approach to following Christ. You're in a battle. And your greatest enemy is within you.

The Battle Within

I've spoken with many Christians who were frustrated by this promise recorded in Romans 5:17: "Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." Why does this passage bother them? Because they don't see any evidence they *are* reigning in life, especially in the areas where they are most vulnerable to temptation and sin.

The problem isn't with the promise. The problem stems primarily from their false expectations of the Christian life and a misunderstanding of sin.

“ Sin is a state of heart, a condition of our inmost being. It is a state of corruption, of vileness, yes, even of filthiness in God's sight.²

— Jerry Bridges

Let's look briefly at what sin is and where it originates. Sin can be defined as "any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."³ It is more than a mere shortcoming or mistake or lapse in judgment. Sin is a violation of God's

perfect moral standard. When we sin, we sin against him. "We never see sin aright," said W.S. Plumer, "until we see it as against God....All sin is against God in this sense: that it is his law that is broken, his authority that is despised, his government that is set at naught."⁴ Sin always grieves God, often hurts others, and consistently boomerangs with personal consequences for the sinner.

So why *do* we sin? Having been justified (declared righteous) by a merciful God, why do we still find certain sins so appetizing, even though we know they are clearly off limits for a Christian?

Jesus pinpointed the nerve center of sin (a skill we need to learn) during a dialogue about hygiene. Some Pharisees had criticized the disciples for not washing their hands at mealtimes. Jesus used the occasion to make a powerful statement about indwelling sin:

Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him "unclean"? For it doesn't

For Further Study:

According to Romans 5:12, how did sin enter the world? How widely did it spread?

go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body...What comes out of a man is what makes

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Which of the following do you feel has taken the greatest toll?

- ☐ The 1945 bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- ☐ The repeated typhoons and floods in Bangladesh
- ☐ The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear meltdown
- ☐ The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill (10 million gallons)
- ☐ Adam and Eve's sin and its continuing effects

him "unclean." For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean." (Mark 7:18-23)

It would certainly be convenient if we could point to other people or outside circumstances as the cause of our sin. But Jesus' point is unavoidable: sin bubbles up out of the polluted cesspool of the human heart.

The following illustration is geared more toward men, but I trust women will be able to relate. Imagine you have been limping around town for the last umpteen years in a run-down Ford Escort. It has 150,000 miles and isn't much to look at, but it gets you where you need to go. Then one Saturday morning, Gene—your neighbor and (former) friend—invites you over to see his brand new, loaded minivan. (As if he really needed one...he only has one kid!) You get in and are immediately overpowered by the new smell. Gripping the steering wheel, you fantasize you are flying down the highway with a worship tape cranked all the way up on his 15-speaker stereo (to give God the glory, of course). Then Gene throws your little dream trip into sudden reverse. "How's *your* bag of bolts holding up?" he asks with a smirk. "Got any floorboards left under all that rust?"

You smile politely and compliment Gene on his new van. Inside you are actively questioning the justice of God. On your way past your faithful Ford Escort, you mutter a few words you thought you'd forgotten and storm into the house, disgusted even to own such a piece of junk.

Now for the post-sin analysis...At first glance you may be tempted to think Gene caused your envy. Not only was he foolish enough to waste his money on a total luxury (in your opinion), but then he had the gall to invite you to sit in it so that you would have to act all excited for him. (At the very least, he could have rolled down the windows to get out that sickening new-car smell.)

But as we saw in Mark 7:18-23, Jesus doesn't start where we start. He wouldn't blame your envy on Gene's

“ Scripture teaches that the *seat of sin* is to be found in the heart of man. ‘Temptations and occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before.’ All real sins proceed from the heart.⁵ ”

— Sinclair Ferguson

insensitivity or his new van. Instead, he would remind you that envy is dwelling within your heart, ready to jump out at the slightest provocation. This time it was Gene’s van. Tomorrow it could just as easily be something else.

Someone once said the potential for the most heinous sin lies in the bosom of every man—Christians included. This is true because even after regeneration, the seeds of indwelling sin remain in our hearts. Listen to Sinclair Ferguson’s insights on this subject:

What does Scripture mean by the heart? Sometimes it means the mind and the understanding, sometimes the will or the affections, sometimes the conscience, or the whole soul. Sin’s strength in the heart lies in its unsearchable nature—there is always more there than can be discovered; it lies too in the deceitfulness of man’s heart which is full of contradictions.⁶

Since we live with a heart that is inclined to stray from God’s moral standards, how can we avoid grieving him? How can we cap this internal well that keeps spewing out sinful sludge?

In past generations, some people squirreled away in monasteries and convents trying to escape the tempting influences of their day. One man, Simon Stylites, spent thirty-six years perched on a tiny platform sixty feet high thinking he could avoid sin by isolating himself from people and outward temptation. But neither he nor anyone else has found a way to escape the heart’s magnetic attraction toward sin.

Our most dangerous adversary, as the Puritan pastor John Owen recognized, is constantly attacking us from inside:

There is an exceeding efficacy and power in the remainder of indwelling sin in believers with a constant inclination and working towards evil. Awake, therefore, all of you in whose hearts is any thing of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only *upon* you, as on Samson of old, but is *in* you also.⁷

Meditate on Isaiah

64:6. If this is what our righteous acts are like, how do you think our *sinful* acts appear to God?

Change Is Possible...but Not Overnight

Before anyone would have mistaken him for a saint, the renowned Augustine was a professional sinner. He spared himself no gutter: strong drink, sexual trysts, and all sorts of carnal pleasures were fair game. Then the Holy Spirit invaded his life and turned him into a radical follower of God. But not overnight. It is said that shortly after becoming a Christian, Augustine prayed, "Lord, give me chastity...just not yet!"

For Further Study:

Read Hebrews 6:11-12.
Can you find three qualities here that make change possible?

Like all of us, Saint Augustine faced the reality of indwelling sin. He knew he had to give up his sinful lifestyle, but within his heart there remained a craving for evil. He eventually changed, however, and began living a life pleasing to God. You are to do the same. In order to escape sin's enticing pull on your heart, however, you'll need a strategy—a three-part strategy.

Strategy #1: Avoid Temptation

Temptation strikes at the instant you begin drooling over Gene's new van. (Perhaps for you, ladies, it's Wendy's three-carat diamond engagement ring). The battle hinges

“ There is no man that is altogether free from temptations while he liveth on earth: for in ourselves is the root thereof, being born with an inclination to evil. When one temptation or tribulation goeth away, another cometh; and we shall ever have something to suffer.⁸ ”

— Thomas à Kempis

on that moment of decision: Will you obey God or disobey? Will you yield to sin's enticement? Or will you subdue that desire and submit to God's will by rejoicing with Gene and Wendy?

Don't be surprised when you experience temptation. As Jesus told his disciples, "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew

26:41). Instead, you should find it comforting to know that your Lord himself was subjected to every possible outward temptation, yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He can relate to your struggle. Better yet, he can help you *win* your struggle:

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. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

So what's the secret? What is the escape route from

For Further Study:

What advice does Paul give in the following verses? (1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22)

anger, resentment, pride, lust, envy, fear, and the host of other sins that tempt us?

The first and best strategy is to avoid, wherever possible, those situations that might entice you to sin. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation,” said Jesus (Matthew 26:41). Which do you think is easier, slugging it out against burning temptations or avoiding situations where temptation is likely to strike? Obviously the easiest battle is the one not begun. It’s not cowardly to run away from temptation. It’s wise.

But you won’t be able to avoid temptation all the time.

You live in a sinful world, and sin lives in you. Your heart is a professional con artist, deceiving you time after time into thinking you can walk on the edge of compromise without falling. Consequently, even though you do your best to avoid temptation, you’ll need a more aggressive strategy than this to win the battle against sin.

2 Briefly describe one temptation you face on a fairly regular basis.

(Has God shown you a way to avoid it?)

Strategy #2: Put Sin to Death

What would have become of Butch Wyman had he taken a casual approach to his predicament? He never would have lived to tell about it. Immediate, radical action was his only hope for survival. It’s no exaggeration to say the health of your life with Christ requires the same radical action against sin:

Meditate on Romans

8:13. Every Christian is called to be an executioner!

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. (Colossians 3:5-8)

“Put to death”—it’s a violent phrase, isn’t it? Paul wasn’t playing around with the Colossians when he wrote this to them. He wanted them to deal ruthlessly with sin. To hate it with God’s hatred. To take every precaution against it, and when it got the best of them, to confess their sin to others and repent earnestly before God. Whatever form it took, and regardless of how much it might hurt, Paul urged the Colossians to cut sin out of their lives so they

could live in the freedom Christ had purchased for them on the Cross.

There's a term for putting sin to death: *mortification*. Like the Colossians, each of us must mortify indwelling sin in order to mature in God and bear fruit for his glory.

“Sin will not otherwise die, but by being gradually and constantly weakened; spare it, and it heals its wounds, and recovers strength.”⁹

— John Owen

“The well-being of the Christian depends on mortification,” writes Sinclair Ferguson. “Sin must be put to death in him, if he is to enjoy the comfort of the gospel and energy in his spiritual life.”¹⁰

Do you want to experience this energy in your spiritual life? More importantly, do you want to please the One who has saved you and brought you to himself? He *expects* you to grow in holiness. And because sin is the enemy of holiness, you must put it to death. Don't expect it to surrender peacefully.

One of the most exciting things you can look forward to as a Christian is triumphing over sins. As you “fight the good fight,” by God's grace you can steadily reduce the force and frequency of temptations that once overpowered you. However, none of us can hope to see sin completely destroyed until we reach heaven. In this life, as soon as you claim victory in one area, another sin will crop up ready for attack. Mortification is a lifelong commitment—and it's one you have to make if you're serious about following Christ.

Strategy #3: Bring Righteousness to Life

Avoiding temptation and attacking sin are essential strategies. But once the enemy is beaten back, there's a third strategy you must use if you hope to keep sin at bay. It involves the deliberate effort to replace sinful actions by developing righteous actions in their place. Let's look again at a passage we saw in the previous chapter:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to *put off* your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to *put on* the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Taking off the bad is only half of your task; Scripture

For Further Study:

How can you prove that you are a disciple of Jesus? (See John 15: 1-8, especially verse 8.)

calls you to work just as hard (with the Holy Spirit's help) at clothing yourself with the good.

“ It were an easy thing to be a Christian, if religion stood only in a few outward works and duties. But to take the soul to task, and to deal roundly with our own hearts, and to let conscience have its full work, and to bring the soul into spiritual subjection unto God—this is not so easy a matter.¹¹ ”

— Richard Sibbes

For example, consider the sin of pride. If you really want to overcome in this area, don't just concentrate on what you're doing wrong. Do what's right! Humble yourself daily and practice treating others as if they are better, wiser, and more gifted than you are (Philippians 2:3).

Do you want to get rid of impure thoughts? Then in addition to repenting of bad thoughts, fill your mind with *good* thoughts. “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

I'll mention one final example. Perhaps you're bitter about something done to you in the past. You won't win the battle if you simply renounce that wrong attitude. You need to replace it with a godly attitude. Extend forgiveness that woman who hurt you. Grant mercy to the guy who was merciless. Overcome evil with good.

3 Below you'll find a list of “Vices” and “Virtues.” Draw a line connecting each vice to the virtue that would best replace it.

Vices

Depression

Laziness

Complaining

Greed

Gossip

Anxiety

Virtues

Serving

Trust

Generosity

Joy

Thanksgiving

Encouragement

The outworking of the Christian life in its simplest form is this: “putting off” evil and “putting on” good. These new virtues won't appear naturally, however. You will desperately need help from above. But as you grow in your relationship with the Lord, you can expect to see your life yielding more and more of “the fruit of the Spirit”—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). This is maturity. This is growth. This is what God expects of us all.

Our Other Enemies...

If you have been a Christian more than a day or two, you have already realized that following God isn't easy. It's

a battle. Despite the life, joy, and sense of purpose you've experienced, there are moments when it seems virtually impossible to do what God says you should do.

As we have seen, your biggest deterrent to obeying God is the sin within you. Sin isn't something created in you by other people. Outside circumstances can't force you to do evil. Sin is a traitor lodged in your own heart, waiting for a chance to express itself. And you are called to put it to death by the power of God's Spirit and Word.

But you face other enemies, too. As you seek to live a holy life for Christ, you can expect opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Let's look at each in turn.

The World

When the Bible speaks of "the world," it is usually referring to society and culture rather than the spinning ball we call Earth. The Greek word, *kosmos*, appears over 200 times. Lawrence Richards explains its meaning in *The Expositors' Dictionary of Bible Words*:

As a theological term, *kosmos* portrays human society as a system warped by sin, tormented by beliefs and desires and emotions that surge blindly and uncontrollably. The world system is a dark system (Ephesians 6:12), operating on basic principles that are not of God (Colossians 2:20, 1 John 2:16). The entire system lies under the power of Satan (1 John 5:19) and constitutes the kingdom from which believers are delivered by Christ (Colossians 1:13-14).¹²

Our society is not driven by a passion to glorify God. I doubt that surprises you. Executives at MTV and Universal Studios and *People* magazine and the National Football League are not meeting behind closed doors at this moment brainstorming new ways to draw you closer to God. Society's agenda revolves around self-fulfillment and pleasure. Consequently, the world's priorities and goals typically conflict with those God has for you.

"Do not love the world or anything in the world," wrote the apostle John. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). God's kingdom and this world's system are totally opposed. That's why the Bible says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). As a follower of Jesus Christ, you're to be "in the world"—a bold, influential witness for Jesus

Meditate on James 4:4. Have you ever thought you were being God's friend and the world's friend at the same time?

Christ—but not “of the world” (John 17:11-16). Rather than adopting the values and priorities of the godless world around you, recognize them as enemy propaganda, and recommit yourself to living for the kingdom of God.

The Flesh

In centuries past, some Christian sects have mistakenly believed the human body is evil. Nowhere does the Bible say that your skin, hair, bones, and organs are wicked. However, within you is something the Bible calls “the flesh” or “the sinful nature” (depending on what translation you use). Whether you know it by that name or not, the flesh is certainly no stranger to you. You could think of it as your capacity for sin, your propensity for evil. It’s the part of you that responds so readily to worldly enticements while resisting the inner work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, your flesh battles the Spirit for control over your mind, will, and affections. Galatians 5:17 says, “For the sinful nature [the flesh] desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

Resisting the world’s influences is difficult enough; doing battle against the flesh takes great discernment and

perseverance. Here are four manifestations of the flesh you can expect to encounter.

Self-centeredness. From a fleshly perspective, you are the center of the universe. Your reputation, ambitions, feelings, appetites, ideas, and preferences are its chief concern. Your flesh loves to pamper itself and impress others. It does not respond well to the motto Jesus gave:

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...My Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:25,26). In order to master your self-centered flesh, you will need to stop exalting yourself and learn to put the Lord and others first.

Self-sufficiency. The flesh is confident in its ability to do anything, even to fight sin and live for God. Peter, one

“ [The Christian] must be willing to give up every habit and practice which is wrong in God’s sight. He must set his face against it, quarrel with it, break off from it, fight with it, crucify it and labour to keep it under, whatever the world around him may say or think...He and sin must quarrel, if he and God are to be friends.¹³ ”

— J.C. Ryle

Meditate on Proverbs

3:5-6. Who is—and isn't—worthy of your confidence?

of Jesus' closest disciples and friends, insisted he would never deny the Lord. But on the night of the Lord's arrest, Peter did deny him—not just once, but three times. His self-confidence got him in deep yogurt.

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man," said the prophet Jeremiah, "who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:5). Trusting in your own ability is both foolish and proud. But God will be pleased as you humble yourself and live each day depending on the help and strength of the Lord.

Self-righteousness. Jesus reserved his sharpest rebukes for the Pharisees and Sadducees. These self-righteous hypocrites considered themselves spiritually superior to everyone else. That's what the flesh will do to you. It will cause you to criticize the tiniest faults in others while letting major sins in your own life go unchallenged (Matthew 7:3-5). Here are some other common symptoms

of fleshly self-righteousness: being more aware of your virtues than you are of your sins; judging others more harshly than you judge yourself; wanting God to punish others (especially those who have hurt you) while expecting him to have mercy on you; and justifying sinful actions or attitudes toward people who have sinned against you. If any of these shoes fit, recognize that your self-righteous flesh is at work.

Self-gratification. Your flesh is determined to satisfy all its appetites on a regular basis. It aims to get whatever it wants—extra sleep, nicer clothes, an exotic vacation, chocolate cheesecake, you name it. But as a follower of Christ, you are no longer a slave to your appetites:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature [flesh] with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.... (Galatians 5:24-25)

Instead of yielding to your flesh, you are to control it. Instead of pampering your flesh, you are to crucify it. This doesn't mean you can never eat a piece of cheesecake again. But instead of living to satisfy your sinful passions as you once did, you are now taking up your Cross daily in order to become like the holy One in whose footsteps you follow (Luke 9:23-24).

4 Fill in the blanks for the following verse, taken from the New International Version of the Bible:

"For in the same way you _____ others, you will be _____, and with the _____ you use, it will be _____ to you." (Matthew 7:2)

For Further Study:

What's the difference between the two lifestyles described in Ephesians 4:17-24?

The Devil

Your final enemy is the devil, or Satan (a name that means “adversary”). Satan hates God and opposes God’s people. He is a real personality—not just a red-suited, pitchfork-wielding figment of someone’s imagination. The Bible refers to him repeatedly as someone with vast power to do evil. Tony Sargent writes,

Evil is incarnated in Satan. The world, in which he has taken up residence, is infested with his emissaries....What is more, the devil picks out the Church as an object of hate. Individual Christians are in the firing line. Satan’s goal is to eliminate the glory of God, to undo the work the Lord achieved on the Cross. Christians should consider themselves as involved in mortal combat with the enemy of their souls.¹⁴

For Further Study:

The Devil goes by many different names—see Matthew 4:10; Luke 11:18; John 8:44, 10:10; 2 Corinthians 11:14; and Revelation 12:9-10.

What does Satan do? How does he operate? “We are not unaware of his schemes,” wrote Paul (2 Corinthians 2:11). He **prowls** like a lion, looking to devour the unsuspecting (1 Peter 5:8). He **deceives** those who stray from the truth (Revelation 12:9). He **tempts** the saints to sin against God (Matthew 4:3). He **schemes** against God and seeks to outwit God’s people (2 Corinthians 2:11). He **lies** and distorts the truth (John 8:44). He also **accuses** us day and night (Revelation 12:10) and tries to weaken our confidence in God’s saving grace. These are just a handful of Satan’s malicious strategies.

In order for you to be victorious in the battle, it’s vital that you understand Satan’s strengths. But it’s equally important that you understand his limitations. As you’ll quickly see, he is no match for God.

Satan is not all-powerful. There is a fixed limit to his dark and heinous deeds. Any thought of God and Satan

duking it out like two super heavyweights is ludicrous. The devil is far more powerful than any man, but he doesn’t even begin to match up to God Omnipotent.

Satan is not all-knowing.

Though crafty, cunning, and highly deceptive, Satan lacks the infinite knowledge and wisdom of God. “We should not think that demons can know the future or that they can read our minds or know our thoughts,” states theologian Wayne Grudem.¹⁶

“Satan shall not need to tempt him much who has already tempted himself.”¹⁵

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— Obadiah Sedgwick

Satan is not present everywhere at the same time. He admittedly gets around a lot quicker than we do, but he himself cannot be in the demonic temples of Tibet and in my kitchen at the same time. He has to leave one to reach the other. This is good news because it means you and I will probably never encounter a bold, frontal assault from Satan himself. Frankly, most of us just aren't that high up on his priority list. Yet in his service are hordes of ministering demons who inflict much agony, bondage, and grief on the saints of God.

Take Your Stand!

It would be foolish and dangerous to minimize Satan's threat. He is real and he is deadly. However, countless Christians make the opposite mistake and *exaggerate* Satan's threat. Many become so preoccupied with fighting him and his demons that they lose sight of the power and presence of God. They are wasting precious energy. For the wonderful fact is that Jesus has already defeated Satan and his demonic hordes.

Colossians 2:15 says of our Lord, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." A study note in *The NIV Study Bible* fleshes out the full meaning of Paul's words:

The picture is of conquered soldiers stripped of their clothes as well as their weapons to symbolize their total defeat...The metaphor recalls a Roman general leading his captives through the streets of his city for all the citizens to see as evidence of his complete victory....¹⁷

Jesus has dealt Satan a crushing, final defeat. His goose is literally cooked, as we see in the Book of Revelation: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They [including all of Satan's demons] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

The fact that Satan has not yet been eradicated from this planet is not a sign of his power. Rather, it is a sign of God's sovereignty. The Lord will allow Satan access to the earth only so far as it serves his ultimate plan.

Satan is not outwitting God, nor forcing him into some type of cosmic stalemate. It would take but a single word

Meditate on Romans 16:20. Because Jesus has defeated Satan, you share in the victory!

5 A smart soldier can often anticipate an enemy attack and prepare for it. As you look at the coming week, do you see any potential demonic ambushes in the making? (Examples: extra stress at work; lunch appointment with someone who thinks you're nuts for believing in Jesus, etc.)

(What battle preparations can you make *now*?)

For Further Study:

How does Satan use our sins to his advantage? (See Ephesians 4:26-27)

from the mouth of our Lord to overthrow the devil and his entire kingdom. They would be devastated in an instant. Once God chooses to carry out his sentence, Satan and his demonic minions will not trouble us for one millisecond longer.

But, in his sovereign and omnipotent wisdom, God allows our enemy to remain active for a little while longer. And without exaggerating his power, we are to wage war against Satan and his works. You will not get to show your colors against him in heaven, for he will not be there. Only in this lifetime can you win glory for your King by displaying valor against his enemy.

“Put on the full armor of God,” Paul exhorts us, “so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” What is that armor? You’ll find it described piece by piece in Ephesians 6:10-18, a classic passage on spiritual warfare. Though we’ll touch on it just briefly, take some time this week to reflect more on this passage.

The belt of truth. Paul is not referring to doctrinal truth or biblical knowledge, but rather to a lifestyle of truth, or integrity. Satan’s inroads into your life will be greatly limited as you walk uprightly before God and man.

The breastplate of righteousness. Serious character deficiencies will make you vulnerable to demonic attack. But the opposite is also true: dagger thrusts of temptation can’t easily pierce the one devoted to the holiness of God.

The “shoes” of the gospel of peace. There is no better way to combat the accuser than to remind yourself that Jesus Christ has died for your sins. Jerry Bridges says we need to “preach the gospel to ourselves every day.”¹⁸

The shield of faith. Your faith must not rest on your own righteousness or on other believers, but on God. He is all-powerful. He is totally good. He is absolutely sovereign. The more you know and trust him, the less Satan’s lies will influence you.

The helmet of salvation. Salvation is more than being forgiven. It is being freed from the power and penalty of sin. Remind yourself daily that you are no longer a servant of sin because you have been born again and united with Christ.

The sword of the Spirit (the Word of God). This is the only piece of armor listed that can be used to attack. God’s

“ Few things afford the Christian such relief and encouragement as the memory of sins which once ruled him, but which he has conquered by the power of the Spirit of God.¹⁹

”
— J.I. Packer

Word is powerful! As you meditate on it, hiding its truth in your heart, the Holy Spirit will help you wield it well against the enemy.

Butch Wyman knew how to wield a blade in an hour of crisis. Do you? God calls you to battle against the

world, the flesh, the devil, and your own indwelling sin. This is no time to be passive. Stand strong—and fight hard—in the power of the Lord. ■

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Your home is on fire! You only have time to rescue the three possessions you value most. What would you take?
2. Where does sin originate?
3. For the *third* time this week your spouse has locked the keys in the car. You explode: “That makes me soooo *mad*!” According to this chapter, what really caused your anger?
4. Discuss how you could flee one specific temptation.
5. Can you think of any sins God has helped you conquer? If appropriate, give the details.
6. What do you think might happen to a Christian who “put off” sin but never “put on” righteousness?
7. How can a Christian live in the world without loving the world? Try to come up with specific examples.
8. Are there any sins you are reluctant to give up?
9. How would you have rated Satan’s power before reading this chapter? (0 = “Underestimated” and 5 = “Overestimated.”)
10. Do you feel equipped for the battle?

RECOMMENDED *The Practice of Godliness* by Jerry Bridges (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1983)
READING *The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994)
Pleasing God by R.C. Sproul (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988)
Sin and Temptation by John Owen (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967) Though not light reading, this Puritan classic is unrivaled on the subject of understanding and battling sin.