

Understanding Temptation

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(You Can Handle It)

Timothy J Lukings

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INTRODUCTION

Two of the words we cringe at as people, and as Christians, are ‘temptation’ and ‘sin’. Blech. Who wants to waste their time thinking about those things? They remind us of our weaknesses. They remind us of the things that we don’t like about ourselves. They remind us of the fact that we have let God, our self, and perhaps others down. These words represent struggle, weakness, and even failure. They need to be talked about and understood in order to eliminate the struggle and to gain victory over them.

Temptation is a daily event. It is a regular occurrence for everyone. Don’t, for a second, believe that you are the only one. We associate temptation with the devil, but he isn’t always the source. He certainly can be, and very often is, but he doesn’t have soul rights to temptation. We’ll talk about that in a minute.

Sometimes we don’t even recognize it when temptation comes. We border on road rage when someone cuts us off, and blame it on being over tired. The fact is, that person may have made an honest error in judgment while you made a conscious choice to release your anger, saying things you shouldn’t say, and

perhaps making gestures you should make. Temptation to behave that way came from somewhere.

Someone says: “Hey, did you hear about Sally Smith?” Before you know it, you are telling stories about Sally that no one else had any business knowing. You reason that it’s important that people know what Sally is really like. The temptation to gossip came from somewhere.

Temptations are many, varied, and often get us to behave in ways that are contradictory to the nature of God, the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. We are His temple.

It is not sinful to be tempted. No matter the source, temptation is not a sin. If that were true Jesus was a sinner. The Holy Spirit led Him into the desert where he was tempted of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” (Hebrews 4:15).*

Temptation is the thing that plays on our heart and our mind that encourages us to behave in an ungodly manner. It is dangerous to entertain it, because, as James said: *“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:15).* It seems like the gestation period for sin is a brief moment in time on some occasions.

Sin is sometimes things that we ‘don’t’ do. For example, we are told to forgive others. We are to love our neighbour as our self. We are told to take care of the widows and orphans (**James 1:27**). Not doing what we are supposed to do is no different than doing the things that we are not supposed to do. Both are a choice to behave in a way that is different from what God would want of us. They conflict with His nature. Anything that does that is sin.

In this booklet we will get a better understanding of temptation so we can learn how to control it rather than it controlling us.

PURITY IS PROGRESSIVE

At the risk of sounding like a defeatist, we will not achieve perfection while on this earth. We may have our moments, but we will also have moments when we fail to handle temptation correctly. That doesn't change the fact that perfection is our constant goal. We must strive toward it, yet this struggle is real: *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."* (**Romans 7:15-20**)

Thankfully, we are holy in God's sight because of our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**). So, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in*

Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

(Romans 8:1-2). That’s the only reason we have the assurance of going to heaven. Standing before God, He views us as perfect.

The scripture says *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15-16)*. We want that. We want to be holy as He is holy, but nope. That’s just not who we are. This creates a dilemma for us because it seems like an unattainable goal. How could we possibly be as holy as God is? In practicality, it is a goal we must work toward progressively. Because it seems unattainable, one of two things happens.

First, the serious Christian does not make excuses. They recognize that there is sin in their life. They don’t like it and are intent on getting it dealt with. Progression is important to them. They need to see constant change for the better. They need to see growth in their goal of becoming like Christ. They study their Bible and seek the help of the Holy Spirit, progressively tackling their issues one step at a time. They know that holiness is something to strive toward in every situation, and that as they learn how to control temptation, sinful behaviour will systematically and increasingly drop off from the way they live and act. They will take one intentional step after another in becoming all that God

wants them to be. *“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The **second** type of Christian may be very serious about their relationship with Christ, but they have an “I’m only human” attitude toward sin. They accept having certain sins as part of their life because they’ve always been there. They are comfortable with who they are without change. They are content to know that God views them as righteous, through the shed blood of His Son, and that is good enough for them.

We must be careful to not make excuses for ourselves. It’s easy to think that we have behaved a certain way, or we’ve had a certain attitude all our life, and we haven’t been struck by lightning yet. As a result, we reason that God must be tolerant of our behaviour at least. When it comes to being ‘only human’, it’s true. However, we are humans with the presence of the HOLY Spirit living in us. We have the ability to change because of His presence. Don’t settle. *“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). This was the Apostle Paul’s response to the ‘only human’ philosophy: *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means!*

We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2).

The first type of Christian discussed will be more successful in their progression toward Christ-likeness. They will be more productive for the kingdom of God, and they will build up more riches in heaven. The Apostle Paul was that kind of Christian and a great example to us all. *“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12b-14).* Press on toward perfection. It is a lofty and biblical goal.

KNOWING YOURSELF IS KNOWING YOUR ENEMY

Our personalities are all different. We all have different likes and dislikes. We come from different ethnic cultures, family cultures, and even church cultures. Not only that, our genetic makeup is different. All of those things contribute to some of the things that are tempting to us, and how we deal with them.

One person struggles with pornography. Another thinks it is disgusting and doesn't even understand the appeal. One person drinks to excess. Once they start they can't seem to stop, while another has no interest in alcohol whatsoever. One person is easily addicted to drugs while another shrugs their shoulders at it. Someone loves to gossip. Another person wants no part of it. You get the idea. I don't mean to pick on those issues, or to suggest that they are the worst of sins. They simply came to mind because they are common. It is far from an extensive list.

Most of us just deal with the temptation as it comes. That's a dangerous approach because the enemy sneaks up on us. It's harder to defend against surprise attacks. We are so much more successful when we are prepared for it.

A helpful process is to sit down and take inventory of the behaviour and attitudes that tempt you. What are the things you find yourself giving in to? As stated, we will all have a different list. Pay attention to yourself over a period of time – even a month or two and make note of the common temptations that you succumb to. Pay attention to your reactions to certain individuals. Are they judgmental? Do you consider yourself better than them? Do you lack a Christ-like attitude in the way you think of them and behave toward them? What about in the car? How do you react to the other drivers who aren't as good as you? How do you treat your wife, husband, or children when they don't live up to your expectations? Do you gossip? How do you view, and what are your thoughts toward members of the opposite sex? What are the things you do in the dark when no one else is looking? You may as well add those things to the list, because Jesus said: *“For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”* (**Luke 8:17**), and *“What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.”* (**Luke 12:3**).

This is not for the purpose of beating yourself up, or making yourself feel defeated. In fact, it is the exact opposite. If you are honest with yourself in the compilation of such a list, it will help you apply the ‘victory principles’ that we will talk about later. You will be more aware of the devil’s schemes in those areas. It will help you get victory over things that have been your constant weakness and have prevented you from being all that God wants you to be.

Once a list is created, it will be helpful to divide the list into two categories. The first is a list of temptations that seem to occasionally catch you off guard. Every once in a while the temptation to behave a certain way is in your face, causing you to act on it without even thinking. Giving in to this is not something you do all the time, nor does it seem to be a weakness in your character. It is simply a weakness in unguarded moments.

The second is a list of temptations that seem to have a grip on you. When temptation comes in this area, or these areas, it feels like there is no escape. You always respond the exact same way. You always give in. You feel as if you have no control over your thoughts and behaviour in that area. Following, you always feel like a failure as a Christian.

It is very likely that these temptations are what Paul described as Satan's flaming arrows released from strongholds that he has established in our mind. The Apostle Paul wrote the following passages that help us understand who we are up against; and some of his tactics.

“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.” (Ephesians 6:12)

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” (Ephesians 6:16)

We will talk more about these later, but understand that the strongholds that Satan builds in our minds, from which temptations come, must be systematically torn down and destroyed for us to be victorious. If we don't take time to assess our own behaviours, we will likely never identify those strongholds, or the fact that our actions and reactions to life are directly related to them. We either think of our self as a failure as a Christian, or we take the 'I'm only human' approach.

Once we have a better understanding of the weak areas of our lives, we can determine whether we simply need to buck up with God's help, or launch an all-out attack on Satan, putting out the flaming arrows and tearing down the fortresses he has established in our minds.

SOURCES OF TEMPTATION

Satan and his Flaming Arrows

Comedian, Flip Wilson had a weekly variety show from 1970 to 1974. Commonly Flip played a female character on his show called Geraldine. It was not uncommon for Geraldine to do something wrong, or at least not very smart. Her excuse was consistent: “The devil made me do it!” It was funny. Maybe you had to be there.

If the devil could, he would hand us a schedule in the morning and lay out our sin-filled day for us.

The fact is, the devil can't make us do anything, so his alternative tactic is to be sneaky. He tricks us into attitudes, actions and patterns of behaviour that are ungodly. Satan has no new tactics. As was the case in the Garden of Eden, he always appeals to our selfishness or pride (extreme selfishness). Selfishness is at the root of all sin. Despite the fact that his tactic is ultimately always the same, he is a snake. He is sneaky. He is cunning. It's why the Apostle Peter warned us to “*Be*

alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8).

When we talk about Satan, or the devil, we must understand that we are talking about a complex army of devils led by Lucifer, or Satan himself. Satan is a former angelic being. He is not all-knowing, nor is he everywhere present. He has cohorts that assist him in his evil designs. *“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.” (Ephesians 6:12). Daniel 10:13, 20* helps us see that the demonic world is powerful, and organized enough to be assigned to geographical areas. All of that is interesting but of little concern. Our concern is their tactic.

From within the very epicenter of our being, Satan takes control of our thoughts in areas where we are the weakest. He comes into our minds like a Trojan horse. He establishes fortresses or strongholds there. We hardly even realize it is happening, but before we know it he is very influential over us in that particular part – or parts - of our life. Addictions are formed in those strongholds. Prejudice is formed in those strongholds. Consistently wrong reactions to certain circumstances of life are made there. From those strongholds in our thought life he shoots out flaming arrows with which he will attempt to weaken other areas

of the mind. If he can influence the way we think, he can influence the way we act. It's that simple. As Peter made clear, his goal is to completely destroy us or devour us spiritually, so that we are so caught up in sin that our relationship with God seems irrelevant to our life. (See **2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Ephesians 6:11**).

It is in the areas where Satan has established strongholds that we find that our behaviour consistently disregards the Word of God. It feels like we are completely in Satan's grip in that area. We are weak there. We can't seem to say 'no' to the temptations when they come. Hang in there. An answer is coming.

Our Eyes and Minds Conspire Against Us

We don't always need Satan to be tempted. Sometimes we create our own. We can be tempted all by our self. *"For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person."* (**Mark 7:21-23**) We are often guilty of stirring up sinful thoughts by reading, or looking at things that flame the fire of wrongful desires within us. They tip the balance, causing us to act on things that appeal to the sinful nature. *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are*

unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

(Matthew 6:22-23).

If we focus on things that are godly, it will lead to godly behaviour. If we focus on things that are ungodly, it will lead to behaviour that is ungodly. It's just that simple. We must be careful that what enters our mind through our eyes conceives a desire for greater intimacy with God, not a desire to do things that will put a wedge between us.

“...but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” **(James 1:14-15)**

Who's Your Daddy? Generational Weaknesses.

The power of genetics is remarkable. I have two adopted children. With my son in particular, it was amazing to watch his interests develop as he got older. He loved the drums. He is an amazing drummer. No one played the drums in our house, but his birth father played. He also had a keen interest in motorcycles as he approached his teenage years. No one in our house had any real interest in motorcycles, but his birth father did. My son was adopted at seven months, didn't know his

birth parents, and these things were not discussed. These interests were simply built into his character genetically. The power of genetics is mind-boggling, and runs far deeper than physical characteristics.

Evidence seems to point to the reality of what I call generational weaknesses. To be clear I am not talking about 'generational curses' like what is mentioned in Numbers 14:18. That is a whole other discussion, but I can say with certainty that God does NOT punish someone for sin that someone else committed; even if it was their father or mother. God is both fair and gracious by nature. Such an act would violate both of those characteristics.

That being said, following a very informal observation of families over the years, it is my opinion that the things that a person finds to be a strong area of temptation is often something that their parents and even their grandparents may have struggled with. Is that written in stone? No. Does it seem to be a practical reality? Yes. Does that mean that person is pretty much doomed to be sinful in that area of their life? A thousand times NO, but the temptation may have greater pull for them than it does for many others. I have no Scriptural support for this, it is merely personal observation, but it may mean that there is an inherited stronghold in that area. Every stronghold can be

defeated in the strong Name of Jesus. We'll get to that in a moment.

We would do well as Christian parents to observe our children, and if we see them struggling in areas that we have struggled, sit them down. Explain to them that this is a 'generational weakness'. Pray with them for strength to overcome it and give them advice based on your experience as to how to be victorious over that specific temptation.

SINNING WITHOUT SINNING

I said earlier that temptation enters the mind and doesn't become sin until we act on it. That is still true. What Jesus clarifies, however, is that we can act on temptation in our heart without physically committing the act. He teaches that when the desire to sin is so strong that we would commit the act if we could do it without having to suffer consequence, then we have committed the sin in our heart. Here are a couple of examples:

- *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Matthew 5:21-22)*
- *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28)*

This is an important lesson. We must not deceive ourselves.

VICTORY PRINCIPLES

There is no shortage of ways to be victorious over temptation before succumbing to it and committing a sinful act. It is important to be familiar with these principles so we know which one(s) to apply when temptation comes.

Exit, stage left

Early 60's cartoon character, Snagglepuss, used to say: "*Exit, stage left*" whenever he wanted out of a situation and was about to quickly disappear, leaving a cloud of dust.

Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob, had a similar approach to temptation. He worked for the Captain of the Guard in the nation of Egypt. Potiphar entrusted him with literally everything he owned, because God's blessing was on Joseph. Potiphar definitely benefited from that and quite enjoyed it. So did Potiphar's wife. In addition to that, Joseph wasn't bad looking. In fact, he was well-built and handsome, and Potiphar's wife couldn't help but notice. She constantly propositioned him, and he constantly said 'no'. "*One day he went into the*

house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She (Potiphar's wife) caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house." (Genesis 39:11-12).

Sometimes the best strategy in dealing with temptation is to turn your back around and get as far away from it as fast as you can. Even in Joseph's case, there were consequences to doing so; but it was better than the consequence of sin. Exit, stage left.

Escape hatch

When my oldest son was a teenager we had a strategy. He was a good Christian young man, with high moral standards, but we both recognized that peer pressure is sometimes very difficult to resist. So, when he was invited to do something or go somewhere, he would call me for permission. Often that call would be made in the presence of his friends. If he had any concern about attending he would use a 'code word' in his request. I knew immediately to forbid him from going. That way he did not have to say 'No' to his friends. He could blame it on me. The code word gave him a way out. It made staying away from a tempting situation easy for him.

There are times when the back door, like what

Joseph used, seems to get locked behind you. You get into a situation where temptation comes at you hard, and it feels like there is nowhere to run. You feel entrapped, helpless to say 'no'. You honestly feel like sinning is the only option. You feel it is the only way out. It may be telling a lie, or telling a lie to hide the fact that you told a lie. It may be that you ended up somewhere you wouldn't normally go; but you are with a friend who happened to drive. I suppose there are a thousand examples I could use.

Don't give up on avoiding temptation. It may not be easy or obvious, but God promises us that there will always be a way of saying 'no'. He will always provide us with the strength to do the godly thing. There will always be a way to do what's right. Look for the right words to say. Determine to do what will be pleasing to God. Ask Him to guide you and give you strength. You may not be able to run out the back door; but the Father will provide you a way of being able to say 'no' to temptation and to withstand the pressure to sin. *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it."* (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

There is never a temptation that you can't say 'no' to. You are never completely entrapped by it. There is

always supernatural strength to endure it until you spot the escape hatch. Once you spot it, crawl through it immediately. God will make a way for you.

Bible thumping

Jesus is the perfect example in everything. The scripture records that the Holy Spirit actually led Him into the desert for the express purpose of being tempted. He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights while in the desert. He would be starving, and in a very weak state when Satan finally met Him there.

Jesus and Satan were not unfamiliar to each other. Jesus, Son of God was Lucifer's creator. Lucifer lusted after the position God held. He wanted to be worshipped. He wanted to be served. It was the very thing that got him kicked out of heaven. Jesus, in his view, was vulnerable now. Jesus was on earth as a man because of him. Although not tainted by sin, Jesus had taken on the human nature, a nature that Satan was consistently able to manipulate. Not only that, Jesus was in a weakened state. One would think that it was the perfect scenario for Lucifer/Satan to trick Jesus into violating the will of God.

At first, Satan tempted Jesus to use His power as the Son of God for His own purposes. After 40 days of fasting, Jesus was hungry, to say the least. Bread would have been nice, but to use His power for that purpose

would contradict His mission. He was here to do the will of the Father - period. To serve self would have been a contradiction to His purpose, and therefore, a sin. *“3 The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ 4 Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:3-4).*

Secondly, the tempter tried to get Jesus to test God’s faithfulness. To test it, means to question it. *“5 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.’” 7 Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matthew 4:5-7).*

Finally, Lucifer tries for what He has wanted since before time began. He offers Jesus something that wasn’t even his to give, if Jesus would just bow down and worship him. If Satan could come through on this promise, which he couldn’t, Jesus’ could have even avoided the sufferings of the cross. *“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” (Matthew 4:8-10).*

What is important to note here is that Jesus' weapon against Satan was consistent, was effective, and is always at our fingertips. Satan is a deceiver. His goal is constantly to try to get us to behave in a way that is contradictory to the Word of God. We see that in the temptation of Christ. The most powerful antidote against such temptation is the Word of God itself. *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (**Hebrews 4:12**).

When we know the Word of God, it becomes a weapon against Satan's attacks. It enables us to...

-  Identify temptation
-  Acknowledge the will of God within ourselves
-  Tell Satan to leave us alone, because we aren't going to contradict God's will for our life.

In **Ephesians 6:17**, the Apostle Paul refers to the Word of God as the Sword of the Spirit. The Bible is more than a book of words. It is inherently powerful, because they are God's Words. They are words inspired by the same God who spoke worlds into existence, breathed life into man, and one day will destroy the devil and all of His followers. Satan trembles at the Word of God. We need to know it, and use it.

Surrender

Complete surrender to God equates to no surrender to temptation. *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* **(Romans 12:1-2)**

Paul was on to something very simple and yet, very profound. When our lives are given completely over to God, our greatest desire and goal is to live a life that is holy and pleasing to him. Holiness leaves no room for sin, or unholiness. The desire to be holy is one of our greatest defenses against temptation.

When we die to self in order to live for God, we are in a great position. Satan’s methods may change, but at the core of every temptation to sin is an appeal to our selfishness in one form or another. It started out that way in the Garden of Eden, and is no different today. When we have died to self the appeal to selfishness is of no interest. Satan can only influence us in areas that have not yet been surrendered to God. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* **(2 Corinthians 5:17)**

Be destructive

We have divine power to demolish strongholds!

Those Trojan horses that Satan uses to get into our heads and build strongholds in our minds, from which he controls our thoughts and desires, have no power over the Holy Spirit in us. That's just a fact.

What it comes down to is this: It is how intimate we are with God that determines our ability to tear down strongholds. The closer we are to Him, the more conscious we are of the resources available to us, the more aware we are of the Spirit's presence. Also, when we are intimate with God, the weapons in God's possession are within arm's reach. When we lack that close relationship with Him we tend to lack both awareness and ease of access to those spiritual weapons.

Look at these two passages: *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:7-8).* I can't rewrite the Scripture, but think of those two phrases in reverse order. “Come near to God and He will come near to you, then resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” When God and us have a close, intimate relationship, strongholds are quickly identified and God's power is quickly released. Our resistance against the devil needs to become destructive. Tear those strongholds down. *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every*

pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

The power of the Holy Spirit enables us to destroy those constant thoughts we have that contradict the mind and will of God. The thoughts that have us convinced that the devil’s ideas make sense and will make us happier than living God’s way are strongholds awaiting destruction. They can and will be obliterated by the Spirit in us when we choose to yield to him and resist the devil’s influence.

Dress for Success

We won’t look in great detail at each of the items that the Apostle Paul lists in Ephesians 6. He speaks of them as if they are protective garments against the powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil. Sometimes we get so caught up in the description of the pieces of armor and their cultural significance that we miss the simple list of Christ-like qualities that protect us. These behaviors are our best defense against the devil.

- **Truth** – Believe in it. Live it. Speak it. Satan is the father of lies. The truth exposes his deceptions for who he really is.
- **Righteousness** – pure living protects your heart, and also reflects the evil nature of the enemy.

- **Carry the Gospel message with you** – always be willing to share it. Sharing the gospel effectively is the very thing Satan exists to prevent. Effectiveness in this area puts him on the defensive.
- **Faith.** Be unwavering in your trust in God. Satan has no defense against resolute trust in God.
- **Salvation.** Be confident in your relationship with God. Satan can't take that from you.
- **Sword of the Spirit.** Be ready to take the offensive against the devil, resist him, and tear down the strongholds he has established in your mind that influences your behaviour.
- **Pray in the Spirit.** Let the Spirit guide you as you pray for God's protection of others around you who are on the same battleground.

‘Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 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. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can

extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” (Ephesians 6:10-18).

CONCLUSION

The battle against Satan and his evil cohorts is real. It is constant, and his attacks range from being overt to covert. We must always be on our guard. He wants to destroy us spiritually.

The truth is that it is not a fair fight. Satan doesn't stand a chance when we understand his tactics, understand ourselves so we know what to look for, and apply the victory principles in those areas.

We don't need to fear the devil. He cowers at the Name of Jesus, to whom we belong. Be alert, dress for success, and resist Him. You have divine power to be victorious in every attack.