

## CHAPTER 7 THE TROUBLESOME ENEMY

Only his eyes and nose poke out of the surface of the placid water. His nostrils breathe the hot air of death. Despite his size, he remains unnoticed by his prey. His beady eyes focus on the wild pig mulling around the edge of the swampy banks. He submerges into the murky unknown of the brown water, while the pig roots around on the bank looking for evening delights. The small snorting beast takes a step backward, when suddenly the waters churn, and the leathery reptile leaps from the edge of the water. With the deadly clasp of the predator's jaws, the pig jerks and releases a brief squeal as dozens of pointed teeth pierce his tough skin. Then, as quickly as it happened, the pig disappears with his enemy into the liquid grave of the Everglades. Only the choppy blood-filled water testifies to the pig's past existence.

The alligator, a fierce reptile, stalks with the precision of a lion and the silence of the sunrise. His very appearance strikes fear into the hearts of the wise, and his stealth and power command respect from those who dare come near his spooky realm. To walk along his shores unprotected and ignorant guarantees him his next meal. He survives by catching his prey off guard.

So it is with Satan. He thrives on destroying those who think they can outsmart him or those who stroll along his domain unaware of his ability to mangle and kill.

### *Satan*

Understanding the enemy and his tactics will help Christians prepare for Satan's attacks and life's difficulties. Not being prepared for the enemy's attacks can be costly.

Satan does not stand as God's equal and has never been capable of defeating God. Satan is a created being and God has power over him. Unlike God, Satan and his demons don't know all things, nor do they have power to do everything they want (Zechariah 3; Job 1:13; 2:6). Though God didn't create Satan evil, the devil is now the father of all wickedness and wrong.<sup>100</sup>

Some scholars believe that Isaiah 14:12-27 and Ezekiel 28:11-18 refer to Satan and these passages explain why God cast him out of heaven. According to this interpretation, Satan, sometimes called Lucifer or Day Star, lost his position of honor in heaven because he wanted to be like God. Although Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 might refer to Satan, the context is not clear. Luke 10:18, however, clearly speaks of Satan's fall (being cast out) from heaven. Also, see Revelation 12:1-9.

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<sup>100</sup> Notice Satan's description in the Bible. Satan is the tempter (Matthew 4:3). He is the wicked one (Matthew 13:19). He is a murderer (John 8:44). He is the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He can be transformed into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). He is the adversary and a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). He is the great dragon, the old serpent, the devil, and the accuser (Revelation 12:9-10). Furthermore, he goes to and fro in the earth (Job 1:7). His place of rule is the atmosphere of the earth (Revelation 2:13).

One day God will temporarily bind Satan from committing evil (Revelation 20:2-3). God will then release him "for a season" and he will deceive people for one last time. Revelation 20:10 tells of Satan's final destination--hell, where he will suffer forever.

In the mean time, Satan and his forces will do all they can to destroy you. He often bombards believers with lies. Note a few of them, many of which overlap:

- God will never answer your prayers
- You're too sinful to pray right now
- You've asked God for too much lately
- God won't mind if you sin a little
- This little sin won't hurt you
- God owes you this
- God hates you now that you sinned
- God doesn't care about you
- God doesn't want you to enjoy life
- God is not good or fair
- God won't let you do that because he knows you want to
- You'll always struggle with this particular sin
- You should sin now because you're going to give in eventually anyway
- No Christian would ever think or do what you did
- Don't read the Bible because you won't understand it
- Don't tell anyone about your secret sin, you can handle it
- Sin now and repent later
- This sin will bring you lasting pleasure
- Go ahead and sin so you can get it out of your system
- God will never forgive you again for that same sin
- You've got to earn God's approval
- You're too good to commit a sin like the other guy did
- Just one quick look then you can change the channel

Satan lies to provoke you to take your eyes off of God. The devil schemes to leave you feeling condemned and hopeless. Until God casts Satan and his demons into hell, they might tempt you, but they can't make you sin. Despite Satan's lies, you can obey God's Word and resist sin (Romans 13:14).

Note the teaching of Ephesians 4:26: "If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let the sun go down with you still angry--get over it quickly; for when you are angry, you give a mighty foothold to the devil" (Living). Satan searches for a weakness in your life--physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological--so he can get a foothold. He might even try to use Scripture against you, as he tried to do with Jesus (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). Beware of such sins as jealousy, pride, lust, and uncontrolled anger.

You alone cannot defeat these sins, but you can rely on the protection Christ provides. James 4:6-8 says:

*But [God] gives us more and more strength to stand against all such evil longings. As the Scripture says, God gives strength to the humble but sets Himself*

*against the proud and haughty. So give yourselves humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. And when you draw close to God, God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and let your hearts be filled with God alone to make them pure and true to Him. (Living)*

The next time you feel overwhelmed by temptations, sing a praise song to God. If you don't know any, make up one. By focusing on the greatness of God, many times the lure of a particular temptation will fade. Although this might sound trite, and I'm aware of the pressure temptation brings, focusing our minds on good things is better than trying not to think about bad things. Consider the words of John Piper, a Minneapolis pastor, "I know of no other way to triumph over sin long-term, than to gain a distaste for it, because of a superior satisfaction in God."<sup>101</sup>

### *Spiritual Warfare*

As a 13-year-old boy, I took karate lessons--Tae Kwon Do to be exact. We frequently sparred each other at the end of class. I recall the humiliation and pain that sometimes stemmed from my lack of preparation and skill. On occasions, I'd spar my instructor and these served as humbling experiences. I'd hold my hands up in front of my face, and despite my best efforts, he'd smack me in the eye with the fastest backhand I've ever seen. He'd hit me over and over, popping me in the eye. At one point, my eyelid folded over, and I had to stop to flip it back down. Eventually, I learned to keep my hands up and be ready for an attack at any moment (not that I ever learned to block sensei's relentless eye shots). In the same way, you should prepare for Satan's attacks. However, the forces you fight as a Christian are not physical but spiritual (See 2 Chronicles 32:8; Zechariah 4:6).

The Apostle Paul describes the serious nature of this battle in Ephesians 6:10-18:

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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. 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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

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<sup>101</sup> *Desiring God* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1996 revised ed [1986]), 11.

Satan wants you to believe that your enemies are politicians, the folks in Hollywood, scientists, Muslims, professors, atheists, or fellow believers. Yet Paul, in Ephesians 6, reminds believers that Satan and his forces rank as their ultimate enemies. Also see 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

### *Temptation and Spiritual Warfare*

When sparring other students in Tae Kwon Do class, I tried to seize the moment when my opponent was most vulnerable. If he held his arms too far apart or left his elbows out, a swift kick to the ribs usually did the trick. Similarly, Satan's ongoing desire in spiritual warfare is to tempt you during your weakest moments so you will surrender to his enticements. You will certainly face temptation, but you can face it successfully.

Romans 5:12 says that you were born a sinner (i.e., you had, and still have, an inclination toward sin). As stated earlier, all people have sinned (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23). If you follow Christ, however, God has planted in you a desire to please Him.<sup>102</sup> By imparting His Spirit, God equipped you with the ability to obey His Word and resist sin. Yet, you still remain capable of sinning. While on this earth, you will not experience total freedom from sin, but you can live victoriously, nonetheless.

As a Christian, your sinful nature no longer dominates you, but it still influences you.<sup>103</sup> Galatians 5:17 says, "For the sinful nature 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." In other words, sin need not enslave you as it did before salvation, but sin still exists, and you must obey the Spirit to resist it (2 Timothy 2:22).

Again, James 4:7-8 commands, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

Also, consider what 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "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." How reassuring to know that you can trust God! He will never leave or forsake you (Hebrews 2:18). All believers struggle; even the Apostle Paul struggled with temptation (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

The Bible explains that God does not tempt people (James 1:13). Temptation comes from Satan, who distorts good human desires (e.g., to eat, to have sex, or to rest). Being tempted is not sinful. Nevertheless, you face temptation when you are drawn away from God by your own desires.

Because you have the tendency and ability to sin, you will often give in to temptation. However, you don't *have to yield* because Christ has defeated sin. The Apostle John (ca. A.D. 85) said, "...for every child of God can obey Him, defeating sin and evil pleasure by trusting Christ to help him. But who could possibly fight and win this battle except by believing that Jesus is truly the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5, Living).

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<sup>102</sup> See Romans 6:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; 5:24.

<sup>103</sup> See Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:22-25; Colossians 3:5-16.

Satan often seeks to provoke your sinful desires. He will attack you in at least three areas: *the lust of the flesh*, *the lust of the eyes*, and *the pride of life* (1 John 2:16). Satan tempted Eve, and later Jesus, in these three areas.<sup>104</sup> Notice that Eve and her husband Adam succumbed to temptation, but Jesus resisted. Interestingly, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. Knowing Scripture will help you discern between right and wrong.

Satan succeeded in arousing and distorting Adam and Eve's natural desires, but he failed to provoke Jesus to sin, because Jesus, though human, obeyed the Father and resisted sin. In Matthew 4 and Luke 4, Jesus' victory over temptation clearly showed His power over Satan.

Yielding to temptation eventually leads to destruction (James 1:15). If you are going to defeat evil thoughts, you must replace them with good and wholesome ones (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, 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."

At some point in life, we all fail at something. Even Thomas Edison who invented the phonograph, electric light bulb, and more than 1,000 other patented inventions, faced extreme failure when, as a young boy, he was kicked out of one school because they labeled him "retarded."<sup>105</sup> As history shows, he overcame his failure.

Failure is a part of life. You too will fail, sin, and make many mistakes.<sup>106</sup> But you should never be comfortable with your sin anymore than you would with a pebble in your shoe. When you sin, immediately repent and continue following God. Consider these chiding words of wisdom in Proverbs 24:10, "You are a poor specimen if you can't stand the pressure of adversity" (Living).

When you sin, ask God to forgive you, and accept that He has forgiven you. He knew of your blunders long before you committed them. So confess your sin to God, thank Him for His unchanging love, ask Him for help, and determine not to commit the same sin again. Get up and go on, "...for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16).

### *The Enemy and Difficulty*

Because of sin and Satan, difficulty promises to track us to the grave. Consider the circumstances of one of my dearest friends, Mrs. Calfee, an elderly lady in the church where I grew up in Tennessee, who's now in heaven. During the last few years of her life, I visited her in the nursing home and hospital. Although I went to encourage her, she usually encouraged me. Her passion for Jesus bubbled continuously. Frequently, tears ran down her face as she spoke about the beauty of heaven.

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<sup>104</sup> Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:3-10; Luke 4:1-13.

<sup>105</sup> See s.v. "Edison, Thomas," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1986, 15<sup>th</sup> ed.

<sup>106</sup> See Proverbs 28:13; James 4:4; 1 John 3:8; 5:18.

Nevertheless, she lived a hard life. Her dad had abandoned her family prior to her birth. She buried five of her siblings, her husband, and four of her children. On top of that, she spent the last few years of her life in misery. She experienced blood clots, multiple strokes, arthritis, diabetes, kidney problems, Parkinson's disease, Bell's palsy, cancer on the face and eye, cataracts, hernias, and underwent 13 surgeries.

Mrs. Calfee entered the Intensive Care Unit five times, and lived in one rest home and three nursing homes before she went to heaven. Yet, her sweet attitude and love for Jesus dazzled more than a few people. Although she experienced enormous trouble, she relished God's faithfulness.

Your problems might differ from Mrs. Calfee's, but you will also face hard times (James 1:2-8). Despite trouble, the Spirit comforts believers during hard times (John 16:7). Persevering through difficulty can result in your own benefit because of the lessons God can teach you by enduring trials (Deuteronomy 8:16; Job 23:10). "For many, the deepest growth in humble, joyful reliance on God will be in the context of the most bloody battles, which appear to be tragic losses and not glorious victories."<sup>107</sup>

The experience and maturity gained through suffering gives one the ability to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1; 1 Peter 1:7). Paul encourages the believers in Rome by saying:

*We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us--they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. (Romans 5:3-5, Living)*

Suffering might be more bearable if you keep in mind your destiny--heaven. For example, Jesus faced agony on the cross but endured it because of the joy that awaited Him in the presence of His Father (Hebrews 12:2). Suffering taught Paul to rely more upon Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:24-28; 12:7-10).

Loved ones will die, your car will malfunction, and things you cherish will break. When these difficult times arise, ponder what lesson you can learn from these events. Hardships should always cause Christians to examine their lives to see if their difficulties are corrections from God.<sup>108</sup> This is not to say that God sets out to punish people, but He does correct His children when they step out of line. Certainly not every difficulty is personal retribution for your sin, but you will want to ponder this as a possibility when encountering hardship.

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<sup>107</sup> Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Matthew 5:11; Hebrews 12:5-13; 1 Peter 2:20.

### Persecution

Furthermore, at times you will be disliked and ridiculed because of your Christian beliefs (Matthew 5:11; Acts 5:41). In John 15:18-25, Jesus tells His disciples to expect persecution. If Jesus and His disciples suffered, should you expect anything differently? If you are living for Jesus, persecution will come (Philippians 1:29).

Listen to Paul's sobering words in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and those who decide to please Christ Jesus by living godly lives will suffer at the hands of those who hate Him" (Living). However, despite the difficulty involved with faithfully following Jesus, you can still live a responsible, effective, joy-filled Christian life.

Revelation 12:10-11 says,

*Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

I'm afraid that too many American Christians have lost sight of what it means to really follow Christ. Many think bearing their cross means enduring another boring day at work or having to drive a Corolla instead of a Lexus. They've forgotten that Jesus told His disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Taking up our cross means facing death for the cause of Christ. Some reports show that 200,000 Christians faced death in 2003 because they claimed Christ as their Savior. Who knows how many went unrecorded? What does our faith cost us? If the answer is "nothing," then it's time to walk closer to the dangerous edge of God-honoring ministry.

The fact that Jesus holds all authority and that He will never leave His followers enables us to fulfill His command to go and teach all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). The truth of God's power in our lives sets us free to take chances and risks for the sake of God's glory that would otherwise be foolish.

The simple truth is this: if we are going to reach some of the unreached peoples of the world with the gospel, many of us must die as martyrs. I don't want to be a martyr, but I do want to be faithful. And if being faithful means dying for my faith, then I pray that the Lord will give me the grace to die upholding His great majestic name. That's not foolish thinking, that's biblical thinking.

### Summary

Satan knows He cannot destroy God, so he attacks God's creation. Specifically, Satan seeks to destroy humans. The devil constantly engages believers in spiritual warfare. He cannot lead believers to hell, so he attempts to damage their influence for Christ. Thus, he and his demonic forces tempt believers. Even though believers can, and do, surrender to temptation, they need not be enslaved to sin. Hard times often accompany temptations. The world is not perfect and difficulty abounds. Christians often suffer persecution because of their faith. Nevertheless, God uses hard times to make believers more responsible and effective vessels for Him.

### ***Assignments***

1. Memorize John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," and 1 Peter 5:8, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
2. Read Romans 8:28-29.
3. List several things that currently cause you stress, frustration, or pain. How might God use these problems to help you? Have you done anything that has contributed to your difficulties?
4. What are some of the lies Satan frequently tells you?

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. Is it sinful to be tempted?
2. How can you most effectively deal with evil thoughts? (Hint: Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8.)
3. What are the items of spiritual armor that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:14-18?
4. Does facing difficult times necessarily indicate that a person is rebelling against God?

***Answers to Chapter 7 Discussion Questions***

1. Is it sinful to be tempted? *No. Even Jesus faced temptation. But, James 1 teaches that we are tempted when we are drawn away by sin in our hearts. Jesus wasn't tempted for that reason, but you and I are.*
  
2. How can you most effectively deal with evil thoughts? (Hint: Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8.) *You can think upon wholesome and godly things. I would also recommend that you enlist another mature believer of the same sex to talk to about these things.*
  
3. What are the items of spiritual armor that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:14-18? *The belt of Truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit (the Word of God), and prayer.*
  
4. Does facing difficult times necessarily indicate that a person is rebelling against God? *No. Hard times come to all people whether Christian or not. That's life! But you should closely examine your life during hard times, because it could be correction from the Lord.*