

The Christian Fight — How You Can Win!

The Word of God tells us that all who will follow the Christian way of life will have to face three deadly enemies, each of which tends to discourage us from overcoming sin and developing the character of God. These deadly foes can come between us and God. They put wedges into our minds that can grow, gradually separating us from the guidance and power of God's Holy Spirit and the faith of Jesus Christ — but only if we allow them to do so.

God says these enemies must be defeated, and He tells us how to do it!

1. Does the apostle Paul show there is effort involved in living the Christian life — that eternal life is worth fighting for, so we do not let it slip from our grasp? I Timothy 6:12, 1:18-19. Whose "soldier" was Timothy? II Timothy 2:3-4.

2. Did Paul steadfastly follow God's way of life — did he know, shortly before his death, that he had won the Christian fight? II Timothy 4:6-8.

3. Is the Christian's warfare against physical armies, or is it a spiritual warfare? II Corinthians 10:3-4. Just what is a Christian to fight against? Verse 5.

The first enemy in the Christian's daily warfare is his human nature with its ungodly characteristics (Galatians 5:19-21). Human nature causes us to rationalize deceitfully (Jeremiah 17:9). It entices us to sin — to break God's spiritual law — which cuts us off from Him. Our nature can destroy us spiritually unless we resist its wrong impulses, which lead to sin.

4. What is the second deadly enemy of all Christians? Galatians 1:4. What should a Christian's attitude be toward this world's social order, with its glitter, glamour, status-seeking and alluring appeal? I John 2:15-17.

The apostle John was referring to the society of this world, so much of which is built on and motivated by vanity, self-centeredness, lust and greed.

Because most people have been spiritually deceived (Revelation 12:9), they don't understand how so many of the world's ways could be wrong in God's sight. Nevertheless, this world's ways do bombard Christians continually with

temptations that can lead them away from following Christ.

5. Should Christians strive to avoid the evil that is in the world? II Corinthians 6:14-18, Revelation 18:4. Does this mean they should move away from populated areas? John 17:15-18, especially verse 15.

Christ's prayer in John 17 shows that God does not expect Christians to move to the mountains or deserts to escape the world's distractions. Rather, they should strive to be separate *spiritually* and refuse to participate in the sins of the world.

6. What, or who, is the third great enemy of every Christian? I Peter 5:8-9. Isn't Satan the devil ultimately responsible for inspiring all the evil in this world? II Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:1-2. As the invisible ruler of this world, has he deceived the whole world? Revelation 12:9.

Satan the devil, formerly known as the archangel Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-14, Ezekiel 28:14-17), became perverted in his thinking and thus developed his evil nature, which he has broadcast to humanity ever since Adam and Eve. Humans have unsuspectingly acquired Satan's nature, which we call "human nature." Notice how Paul described this natural state of mind: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

But once the Holy Spirit of God is added to a person's mind, he has access to the spiritual power to resist the attitudes of self-centeredness, lust, vanity and hate that are spiritually broadcast to the mind by Satan.

No person is compelled to obey these impulses from Satan. The devil has no power to force anyone to think or do wrong! But the unsuspecting automatically do so without realizing what is taking place in their minds. Most people just drift along, responding to emotions and impulses that often find expression in fleshly drives and vain pursuits.

Thus Satan, the "god of this age," "the prince of the power of the air," is actually working "in" (Ephesians 2:2) the minds of unsuspecting people all over the world. That is why the Bible describes this world as "this

present evil age" (Galatians 1:4), and why the world is so thoroughly deceived today!

7. After one is begotten by God's Holy Spirit, which makes him a real Christian (Romans 8:9), the devil will continue to try to deceive him, to lead him away from Christ and His way. What did Paul warn the Corinthian Christians? II Corinthians 11:2-4, 12-15. Did some Christians in Paul's day begin to fall victim to the devil's promptings once again? Galatians 1:6-8, 3:1.

Conversion does not shield us from Satan's wavelength. He continues to broadcast the attitudes of his nature to our minds in an attempt to spiritually overthrow us. When Jesus spoke of overcoming, He referred to overcoming Satan's way. True Christians are fighting to overcome Satan's subtle urgings and the teachings of his false ministers, striving with God's help to remain true to His way.

Before Jesus Christ could qualify to restore the government of God and rule all nations, He had to withstand Satan's most severe temptations. That supreme struggle is recorded in Matthew 4. Notice how the devil attempted to influence Jesus Christ to sin against God.

8. After Jesus had fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness, how did the devil appeal to Jesus' extreme hunger? Matthew 4:1-3. And to the potential desire for prestige, glory and power? Verses 5-6, 8-9.

9. How did Jesus immediately respond to each of these temptations? Verses 4, 7, 10. What was the outcome of this titanic spiritual battle? Verse 11.

Jesus Christ overcame the devil! He resisted Satan and conquered him, showing His mastery over him. When He gave the devil an order, Satan had to obey. He slunk away, knowing he was defeated in this supreme spiritual encounter of all time. Christ overcame the devil's wiles by the Word of God. He responded to the devil's temptations by citing the scripture that applied in each situation. He knew the Word of God thoroughly. Christ knew God's will and He obeyed it. Therefore, the devil could not deceive Him.

10. Should Christians today also resist the devil with the truth God has revealed to them? I Peter 5:9. What must the devil do if resisted steadfastly? James 4:7.

11. What instructions on fighting against the impulses and attitudes of the devil does God give us through Paul? Ephesians 6:10-12. Besides using the power of God's Spirit, what should Christians "put on" to fight this spiritual battle? Verses 11, 13. Of what does God's spiritual armor consist? Verses 14-17.

We are to be clothed with the revealed "truth" of God (John 17:17) so we can't be

deceived, and wear the "breastplate of righteousness," which is the keeping of God's law (Psalm 119:172).

Our feet are to be shod "with the preparation of the gospel of peace" — we are to be actively doing our part in getting out the message of the soon-coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:14) that will rule this earth and bring it peace.

The "shield of faith" protects us from the attacks and enticements of Satan. This is not our own human faith, but the very faith of Jesus Christ, which can be within us (Galatians 2:20, Revelation 14:12). Christ's faith is imparted to us by God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

The "helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17) keeps us properly oriented toward our spiritual goal. It is the knowledge of God's awesome purpose for mankind — of becoming Spirit-born members of the Family of God!

The "sword of the Spirit" refers to the written Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). It is the Christian's only offensive weapon in fighting against the devil's influence. To rightly use this weapon we must study the Bible and learn God's will and His promises.

12. What else did Paul say is necessary to win the Christian fight? Ephesians 6:18-20.

Christians are to draw close to God in persevering prayer (I Thessalonians 5:17), praying for all of God's people, for the Work of God's Church and for their own needs.

This is the formula for successfully overcoming Satan and forcing him to flee. This is the perfect strategy for defeating human nature and the sinful attractions of this world, which are both motivated by the archenemy of God.

Spirit-begotten Christians have a continuing spiritual fight on their hands. But with the Word of God as their sword and His armor as their protection, and if they persevere to the end, they will succeed in overcoming all three deadly foes!

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