



# *Bible & Life*

## Bible Teaching Newsletter

**BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE**

Vol. 26, No. 5

December 1, 2019

### **The Battle Is the Lord's (Part 1)**

by David Dunlap

If sin is a defeated enemy, why does it cause us so much trouble? If sin's dominion has been broken, why does sin seem to dominate us so often? Every honest Christian will testify that becoming a believer does not erase the tendency to sin. We still derive pleasure from sin. We still struggle with sinful habits. Some of those habits are so deeply ingrained that we continue to battle them for many years. We fall into appalling, shameful sins. The truth is, we sin daily. Our thoughts are not what they ought to be. Our time is often wasted on meaningless and worldly pursuits. From time to time, our hearts grow cold to the things of God. Why does all this happen if sin's dominion is broken?

#### **Partial Obedience, Saul, and King Agag**

An Old Testament illustration may help to shed light on our relationship to sin. In 1 Samuel 15, we read that Samuel anointed Saul and solemnly gave him these instructions from the Lord: "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has..." (v. 3). Saul went as Samuel instructed him and fought against the Amalekites. And Saul won a crushing defeat over the Amalekites, routing them from "Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt" (v. 7). Unfortunately, his victory and obedience was only partial. Saul killed all the people, as commanded, but he "captured Agag the King of the Amalekites alive" and "spared... the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good" (v. 8-9) In other words, motivated by greed, Saul and his men kept the best of all the spoil, willfully disobeying the Lord's instruction.

#### **Incomplete Obedience**

Why did Saul spare Agag? Perhaps, he wanted to use the humiliated king of the Amalekites as a trophy displaying his own power. Whatever the reason, he disobeyed the Lord's clear command. His sin was so serious that God immediately removed Saul and his descendants from the throne of Israel. After repenting of his disobedience, Samuel took a sword and killed King Agag of the Amalekites (v. 33). However, there is more.

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***“God is  
looking for  
broken  
men who  
have  
judged  
themselves  
in the light  
of the cross  
of Christ.”***

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**H. A. Ironside**  
(1876-1951)

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***“I am not the man I ought to be, I am not the man I wish to be and I am into the man I hope to be, but by the grace of God, I am not the man I used to be.”***

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**John Newton  
(1725-1807)**

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Saul’s mission was to utterly destroy the Amalekites, but he failed miserably in this mission because of his own greed. Scripture records that only a few years later, the reinvigorated Amalekites raided Ziglax in Israel’s southern territory and took all the women and children captive, including David’s family (1 Sam. 30:1–5).

The surviving Amalekites make a perfect illustration of the sin that remains in the believers’ lives. That sin—already utterly defeated by Christ’s death—must be dealt with ruthlessly or it will revive and continue to pillage our hearts and sap our spiritual strength. We cannot be merciful with our enemy, our sinful nature, or it will seek to devour us. Scripture commands us to count our sinful selves as dead: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to our earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5, *NIV*). We cannot defeat the sin in our lives by partial or halfhearted obedience. We cannot stop while the task remains incomplete. Sins, like the Amalekites, have a way of escaping judgement and then reviving, regrouping, and launching new and unexpected attacks upon our weakest areas.

### **The Lord’s Battle**

A war greater than any that have ever been waged by humankind rages on. This war does not concern the nations of the world but every Christian man and woman in every nation across the world. This war is not waged on ordinary battlefields, yet it is nonetheless real. It has hand-to-hand conflict, sieges, and assaults; it has its victories and defeats. It is the spiritual war, pitting Christ and believers against Satan, sin, and self. The apostle Paul spoke of this struggle writing, “Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Tim. 6:12).

This warfare is closely connected to holiness and living for Christ. Christians are called to be soldiers and must behave accordingly from the day of their salvation to the day of their death. They must never imagine that they will be carried up to heaven on “flowery beds of ease,” as Isaac Watts so fittingly wrote in “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” There is never a day to be a soft Christian—we must battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil daily. We must always be on the watch for deceitful hearts, a busy devil, and an ensnaring world.

God offers Christians spiritual armor; however, Christians must choose to use it. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Take up the full armor of God....Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith. . . . And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:13–17, *NKJV*). While God offers this armor to every Christian, the choice to use it falls upon each believer.

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If we choose to use the armor of God, we can be assured of its effectiveness. Not only is God's armor the best in existence, but the General He provides is also the best in history and creation. Through Jesus, the Captain of salvation, we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).

However, the battle you have to fight is hard. You must take hold of eternal life, fighting the good fight of faith and enduring hardships (1 Tim. 6:12). And you must make up your mind to give yourself to the daily struggle against sin. Man may try to invent shortcuts to heaven, but the Bible speaks only of the way of the Cross, which is the way of conflict with sin. Sin, the world, and the devil must be mortified, resisted, and overcome.

### **How Goes Your Battle?**

So, how goes your battle? Are you overcoming love of the world and fear of man? Are you overcoming your heart's passions, tempers, and lusts? Are you resisting the devil and making him flee from you? When Moses refused the pleasures of sin in Egypt and chose affliction with the people of God, he overcame sin. When Daniel refused to stop praying, despite knowing a den of lions awaited him, he defeated the fear of man. Many professing Christians lack fight. Their sword of the Spirit is never drawn in battle, and so, they do not stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil. They have a powerless type of Christianity, living as if no battle raged on. They attend church meetings where the Gospel is preached and hymns of the faith are sung, but they retreat from the slightest signs of battle. We must be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers" (James 1:22). Some talk much about fighting against sin but, in reality, they are dead to the power of God. Many have the habit of giving in quickly to every temptation rather than fighting. Believer, always be ready to fight the good fight of faith!

Where the spiritual battle rages on, there is proof of the work of sanctification in believers lives. In his classic work *Holiness*, author J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) reminds us:

*"We may take comfort about our souls if we know anything of an inward fight and conflict. It is the invariable companion of genuine Christian holiness...Do we find in our heart of hearts a spiritual struggle? Do we feel anything of the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things we would? Are we conscious of two principles within us, contending for the mastery? Do we feel anything of war in our inward man? Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification...Anything is better than apathy, stagnation, deadness, and indifference."*<sup>1</sup>

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**J. C. Ryle**  
(1816-1900)

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3116 Gulfwind Dr., Land O' Lakes, FL 34639

## December 2019

### INFORMATION

Bible and Life is published periodically and sent out free of charge, supported entirely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. Checks should be made out to "Bible and Life Ministries, Inc."

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Although your enemies are mighty, remember the Captain of your salvation is even mightier. Stand on the promise, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Be on guard against sin so that it cannot have dominion over you—"Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). You may lose a battle or two; you may be faint; but you shall not be cast down. Millions are fighting the same fight. Link arms with your fellow believer; support each other in prayer and encouragement to endure the spiritual battle. In doing so, you will find that "we are more than conquerors" in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 8:37, *NIV*).

In the first seven chapters of Romans, the epistle mentions the Holy Spirit sparingly. Yet Romans chapter 8 references the Holy Spirit at least 20 times. This chapter portrays the Holy Spirit as the divine agent that frees us from sin and death (2–3), enables us to live righteously (4–13), assures and comforts us in our affliction (14–19), preserves and sustains us in Christ (20–28), and guarantees our final victory in eternal glory.

### Conclusion

In Romans 8:13, Paul encourages believers, "if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." After declaring victory over sin in Romans 6 and describing the ongoing struggle with sin in chapter 7, Paul describes the triumphant experience of life in the Spirit throughout chapter 8. In that chapter, the apostle declares the behavior of those who are led by the Spirit—they continually put to death their evil deeds!

### Endnotes

1. J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Nature, Hinderances, Difficulties, and Roots*, (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 57-58