



Bible & Life

Bible Teaching Newsletter

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE

Vol. 27, No. 1

January 1, 2020

The Battle Is the Lord's (Part 2)

by David Dunlap

The discipline of putting sin to death involves the cultivation of new habits of godliness, so that old sinful habits are overcome. As a result, a constant warfare takes place in the Christian life. Although we should lead holy and godly lives, we must be prepared to battle sin until we are glorified in heaven. There are no shortcuts in living a holy life, so we must remain perpetually committed to the task—we must see sin as a sworn enemy and commit ourselves to overcoming it whenever, wherever, and however it appears.

We must remember sin cannot be overcome through legalism, monasticism, pietism, asceticism, Pharisaism, celibacy, self-flagellation, confessional booths, rosary beads, Hail Marys, or any external means. Rather, the instrument for defeating sin is the Holy Spirit, and His power is the energy that works in us to carry out the process. The Holy Spirit equips us with numerous “ways of escape,” or key spiritual disciplines that will help us overcome sin in our lives (1 Cor. 10:13). While many of these disciplines could be discussed, this article will look at the following five:

1. Fix Your Heart on Christ

The apostle John wrote, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). In short, we become like the object of our worship. As we fix our hearts on Christ, we discover that our lives are transformed and that we have an inner power that enables us to live godly and holy lives. Explaining how believers are transformed when their hearts are occupied with Christ, H. A. Ironside (1876–1951) writes:

“The secret of Christian holiness is heart-occupation with Christ Himself. As we gaze upon Him we become like Him. Do you want to become holy? Spend much time in His presence. Let the loveliness of the risen Lord so fill the vision of your soul that all else is shut out. Then the things of the flesh will shrivel up and

***“The secret
of Christian
holiness is
heart-
occupation
with Christ
Himself. As
we gaze
upon Him
we become
like Him.”***

H. A. Ironside
(1876-1951)

**“For every
look at
yourself take
ten looks at
Christ. He is
altogether
lovely. Such
infinite
majesty, and
yet meekness
and grace for
all sinners,
even the
chief.”**

R. M. M’Cheyne
(1803-1843)

disappear and the things of the Spirit will become supreme in your life. We do not become holy by looking into our own hearts. There we only find corruption. Instead we must look away from ourselves and “unto Jesus,” contemplating His holiness, purity, love, compassion, and devotion to the Father’s will. Then we shall be transformed, imperceptibly to ourselves, perhaps, but nonetheless surely into His blessed image. There is no other way whereby we may become practically holy, and be delivered from the power of the flesh and the principles of the world.”¹

Occupation with Christ is the key. When we obsess over how bad we are, we are miserable and weak. Yet many assume that such a focus leads to holiness. In fact, the very opposite is true. The more we turn to Christ, the closer we come to holiness and peace. The Prince of Preachers, C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892), states with great insight: *“Know thyself, O man, and that will make thee miserable; know Thy God, O Christian, and that will make thee rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”²*

2. Meditate on the Word

Do you want success in the battle against sin? Familiarize yourself with the Word of God. Meditate on it “day and night” (Ps. 1:2). Let it be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Ps. 119:105). In Psalm 119:11, the psalmist David wrote, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” Earlier in Scripture, the Lord tells Joshua, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” (Josh. 1:8). As the truth begins to penetrate our hearts and minds, it will confront and attack sin. It is commonly reported that John Bunyan wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible, “Either sin will keep you from this book, or this book will keep you from sin.”

The truth of God’s Word is the medium the Holy Spirit uses in our sanctification. In John 17:17, Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” Therefore, load your mind with Scripture. Fill your heart with it. Ponder it carefully and allow it to direct your walk. Philippians 4:8 reads, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” And Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.” Once you put these instructions into practice, you will discover that “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” is the most effective weapon for defeating sin (Eph. 6:17).

3. Pray Without Ceasing

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took His disciples with Him to Gethsemane and told them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40). Later, when He found them sleeping, He rebuked

them for their lack of prayer, saying, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). Prayer is necessary for effectively warding off temptations before they attack. We should look at prayer as a preemptive strike against the world, the flesh, and the devil. By drawing us near to the Lord and focusing our thoughts on Him, prayer strengthens us against temptations and weakens them when they come.

Identify the circumstances that lead you into sin and pray specifically for strength to face those situations. Pray for a holy hatred of sin; pray that God will show you the real state of your sinful heart. King David prayed, “Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me” (Ps. 19:12–13). Prayer must include confession and repentance if it is to be effective in defeating the sin in our lives. The apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). And Paul writes in Hebrews, “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we might receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

4. Exercise Self-Control

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and one of the means through which the Spirit enables us to put to death the deeds of the body (Gal. 5:23). Here, the Bible speaks of the watchful self-discipline that will not pander to the appetites of the body at the soul’s expense. Jesus said, “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day [of the Lord] will not come on you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34). We are called by God to use self-control to live holy lives for Him. Author and teacher William R. Newell (1868–1956) writes:

“We must note most carefully that a holy life is to be lived by us. It is not that we have any power—we have none. But God’s Spirit dwells in us for the express object of being called “upon by us to put to death the deeds of the body.” Self-control is one of the sweet cluster called “the fruit of the Spirit,” in Galatians 5:22. A holy life without a controlled body is an absolute contradiction; not to be dreamed of for a moment.”³

5. Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

To be Spirit-filled is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and all believers are to yield utterly to the Spirit’s control. This brings us back to Romans 8:13, where we began. We are to defeat or mortify sin “by the Spirit.” Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City, writes about how the Spirit of God works in us:

“An introspective approach to Christianity, whereby you try to change

“Self-control is one of the sweet cluster called “the fruit of the Spirit,” in Galatians 5:22. A holy life without a controlled body is an absolute contradiction; not to be dreamed of for a moment.”

Wm. R. Newell
(1868-1956)



Bible & Life Ministries, Inc.
3116 Gulfwind Dr., Land O' Lakes, FL 34639

January 2020

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."

Correspondence should be sent to:

BIBLE & LIFE Newsletter
c/o David Dunlap
3116 Gulfwind Drive
Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
(813) 494-1680

e-mail

daviddunlap100@gmail.com

web site

www.bibleandlife.org



Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bible-Life/139555992799868>

the negatives in your life—a bad temper, jealousy, the tendency to gossip, etc.—won't make you more like Christ, no matter how sincere you might be in your desire to change. You see, the best way to drive out the junk in your life is not to fight against the junk. Let the Holy Spirit possess every part of your life, and He Himself will drive the junk out for you. When the Holy Spirit is shaping your thoughts and your desires, then you desire holy things Why? Because He's the Holy Spirit! How would I desire an unholy thing if He's controlling me?"⁴

We must always tend to the task of mortifying sin. We may put to death the whole tribe of the Amalekites, but if we deliberately allow one Agag to escape, we will struggle in the Christian life. The flesh is very subtle and deceptive. A particular sin may leave us alone for a while, making us think we are rid of it, but it may come roaring back to life if we are not on guard. Give sin an inch, and it will take a mile. If it can gain a footing in our lives, it will send forth roots and grow like a Kudzu vine. It will use us and abuse us and inflict as much damage as possible.

Conclusion

Never let up for a moment but continue to resist its temptations and "put to death the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13). Denying sin is a duty we cannot rest from until we rest in heaven's glory. Of course, none of this can be done in the flesh, only in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

1. H. A. Ironside, *Continual Burnt Offering*, Loizeaux, Neptune, NJ, Oct. 6
2. C. H. Spurgeon, *Sermon Dilemma and Deliverance*, Spurgeon's Gems, 1859
3. W. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987, p. 309
4. James Cymbala, *Daily Devotions by James Cymbala*, Oct. 1, 2017