

## THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND

### ROM. 12:2: TEMPTATION #6

Benjamin Banneker was a distinguished black scholar. Born in Ellicott, Maryland, he attended a private school there, and then later established a reputation as a mathematician and astronomer with tremendous knowledge of technical diagramming and data. So it came as no surprise when Benjamin Banneker was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of State to a select group of 6 men who would lay the groundwork for the building of a new city.

Today three quarters of a million people live in that city. But most people have forgotten the fact that this city that has become a rather important one was almost not built at all. It was almost not built because of the pride of the chairman of that select committee of 6, a brilliant French architect named Charles L'Enfant. It was his architectural plan that was to be used, and an elaborate plan it was. Filled with futuristic architecture and grand parkways and streets designed to accommodate both beautiful vistas and rapid transit, this was to be a city of both contemporary elegance and rapid communication. However, chairman Charles L'Enfant right in the midst of this great project got his feelings hurt. He was accused of land speculation, he was accused of secret designs because he refused to give out any details of his plans to the press, he was even accused of political scandal. And so one day, the chief engineer and sole architect gathered together all of his plans and went back home to Paris, for good. A very discouraged Secretary of State gathered together the other members of the committee. They would have to start from the beginning, assemble new plans, a brand-new city design, did anyone have any suggestions? That's when Benjamin Banneker stood up and asked if the committee had felt that the old plans were satisfactory. Of course, they were brilliant, but what did that matter now? Those plans were long gone to Paris. Well, Banneker assured them that he had seen those plans once, and he felt that he could remember them quite accurately. Well, you can imagine the incredulous looks that Benjamin received from the Secretary of State and the other committee members. Remember the detailed plans of an entire city having seen them only once? Impossible. To remember the

plans of a single building would be phenomenal, but an entire city? But Benjamin Banneker did exactly what he claimed that he could do. He reproduced in every detail the plans for an entire city with his photographic memory. And that city was built. And the Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, was forever grateful, for one day he would live in one of those buildings as president of the U.S. For the plans that Benjamin Banneker had carried in his mind were those of a city that would be called Washington D.C.

The human mind is without doubt the most complex arrangement of matter in the entire universe. It never ceases to amaze us what the human mind can accomplish. The average brain is just the size of a grapefruit, weighing about 3 pounds. Yet it seems to have limitless capacities. It is able to record 800 different memories per second for an entire life-time, 70,80,90 years, without ever getting tired. Our body gets tired, our muscles get sore, but the brain itself never gets tired. Dr. Gerhard Dirks who holds 60 patents on the IBM computer readily admits that he got most of his inventive ideas from studying the functions of the human brain. Commenting on its complexity, he once stated, "If we could invent a computer that would duplicate the capacities of the human brain, it would take a structure the size of the Empire State Building just to house it." Yes, the mind has wonderful capacities. It has the ability to study a blueprint of an entire city and then reproduce every detail of it. But it also is the source of not only our intellectual capacities, but also our emotional and volitional capacities. And because of its critical nature to us, each one of our minds is a battlefield. We must win the battle for our minds if we are to be victorious in the Christian life.

We have been studying this subject of temptation for the past several summer Sundays. There are 3 major sources of temptation to us, the world, the flesh and the devil. The temptation from the devil comes totally from the outside. He tries to get us to question God's goodness to us and his right to reign in our lives as Lord. He tries to tempt us into assuming the position of Lord in our own lives. When he is successful, we fall into sin and our walk with the Lord is hindered. When we resist him successfully using the word of God as our sword, we are strengthened as we saw with Jesus Christ and his successful defense against the wiles of the enemy.

The temptation from the flesh comes totally from within. It is the inner desire of our fallen, sinful

nature. We looked at this type of temptation last week.

Now this week we want to focus on the temptation from the world, for this temptation comes from outside of us thru the mind, so in a sense it is both an outside and an inside temptation.

When we use the term "world", we need to realize that this word is used in several different ways in the Bible.

1. world as the physical universe -

2. world as speaking of unsaved humanity - both of these usages are seen in John 1:10,11 - He (J.C.) was in the world (physical universe), and though the world (physical universe) was made by him, the world (human race) did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

3. world used of worldwide empires - "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world." Luke 2:1

4. world used of the entirety of the human race - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

5. But the term "world" is also used in the Bible in a distinct sense which is important for us to see with regards to this matter of temptation. Sometimes, world is used to denote the world system, or the world's philosophy of life as being opposed to God's philosophy of life. Satan is called the 'god of this age' in the Bible. He has a carefully conceived philosophy of life which is diametrically opposed to God's truth. And Satan has permeated the fallen world with this philosophy of life so that it has become known as the world's system of thought. When John said these words, he was speaking of this last usage of the term world. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him. For everything in the world- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." I John 2:15-17.

You see, it is not material creation that does not come from the father- God created the physical world. It is not humanity, either fallen or redeemed, that we are commanded not to love. In fact, John is very clear

in his epistle that one of the signs of new life is love for others. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." I John 3:14. But rather, it is this worldly philosophy that has been initiated by God's arch enemy that we are not to accept and love, because adopting this philosophy as our way of life would put us at odds with God himself.

Now with this background in mind, the continuous presence of a worldly philosophy of life opposed to God and authored by Satan, I would invite you to turn to Romans 12 with me as we look at what our response must be to this worldly system of thought that leaves God out of the picture of his universe.

READ Romans 12:1,2.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer 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.

The book of Romans is a great doctrinal treatise on God's redemptive program for the human race. Paul in this epistle has shown mankind to be sinful, falling short of God's perfect standards (1-3). But then he has revealed God's wonderful provision for human sinfulness- justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone (4-5). Because of God's provision for us through Jesus Christ, we have a unique position which gives to us the foundation for living in victory over sin in our lives (6-8). Now after a brief interlude in which he has spoken of the nation of Israel (9-11: her past, present and future), Paul begins to practically apply his doctrinal teaching to the lives of these Roman believers.

We normally focus attention on this first verse- it is a significant one. But this morning, I would like to draw your attention mainly to the second verse. A command- *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* The word for pattern would indicate a mold or a form. I like the way that Phillips has translated this verse. "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within." I think that he has captured the battle for the mind that Paul is speaking of here.

You see, living in this world, the Christian is automatically engaged in a lifelong battle, continual temptation. If the Christian consistently gains victory in this arena, he will grow and develop into the image of Jesus Christ as God intends for him to do. But if the Christian loses this battle for his mind, his life will not be conformed to God's truth, and the Spirit will be quenched within. The battle is waged over whether the Christian is going to accept God's truth as his basic philosophy of life, or if he is going to accept Satan's counterfeit system, the world's system of thought.

God opened the Bible by saying, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Satan thru his world's system has always opposed this truth. Ancient Babylonians and Egyptians had their counterfeit creation epics, and the Greeks and Romans had their philosophies of creation. Today, the evolutionary cycle is the 'modern, scientific answer'. *To believe that a personal, all-powerful God actually created the universe is pre-scientific, ignorant, naive*, the world system says. No, the world happened by chance in an impersonal manner. Now to only see evolution as an attempt to explain the formation of the universe is to only see the tip of the iceberg, for evolution is just a small segment of the enemy's philosophy. Without a personal God who is interested in his creation, there is nothing but a chance, happenstance universe. Have you wondered why some of the biggest businesses today are the lotteries? We shouldn't wonder why, for the lottery is perfectly consistent with a chance universe. What about sin in the world? There can be no sin without the existence of a perfect deity. What about human redemption? Without a personal, interested God no redemption is possible. What about heaven and hell? Not unless they somehow evolved by chance in their own realm. What about meaning and purpose in life? What foundational meaning can there be in a happenstance, chance universe? What about churches and other religious organizations? They have just evolved like everything else showing our feeble attempt to find solace and comfort and meaning in life in an absurd and vanity filled world.

We can see more clearly today than ever before the enemy's very carefully calculated system to rob God of his rightful place as ruler of His universe and to form a system that is godless, that is without a personal creator and guider. Every single day that we live on this earth, we are subjected to the onslaughts of the

world's system of thought that has been authored by the Devil himself. And our children are born and raised in such a world. If we are not extremely diligent, both we and our children are going to be systematically and thoroughly pressed into the mold of the world's philosophy of life. It is a lifelong battle in which we are engaged, because the world is there every day putting pressure on us to conform to it.

Oh, you say, I would never come to the place where I would deny God's creation and accept an evolutionary cycle of life. That might be true, but how easy it is for us to be pressured to the extent that we begin to function in life as if there is no personal, loving God in heaven. Practically, we can come to the place in life where we live with an ungodly worldview.

Asa was the first of the 8 good kings in Judah after the kingdom split. You might recall that we looked at his life at the beginning of the summer. Despite many good things that Asa did in his life, he allowed the pressures of the world's system to eventually push him into its mold towards the end of his life. When Baasha king of Israel began to give him some grief, instead of going to God in prayer as he did early in his reign, he paid BenHadad king of Syria to put some military pressure on Baasha from the north in order to take the stresses off of Judah. A good military move, one applauded by all nations around, but God said Asa had allowed the world to push him into its mold. And when Hanani the prophet came to Asa telling saying, "Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." 2 Chron. 16:7-9, Asa's response was anger and justified rationalization. He threw Hanani in prison, acting just as the enemy himself would. And then the Bible summarizes the end of Asa's reign with these words, "In the 39th year of his reign, Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians." 2 Chron. 16:12. Now there is nothing wrong with physicians and medical science. We praise God for all advances that he has allowed man to develop. But do you see what Asa did? The world so pushed him into its mold that while he always confessed the existence of God, he began to live as if God did not exist, as if

there were not a personal, loving God in heaven. Asa succumbed to the battle for the mind with the world. The world had pushed him into its mold.

What practical difference would it make in your daily routine if God took the day off? Now we know that he wouldn't do that because He has promised not to, but what if he did? If our daily routine wouldn't be altered much, we are living like Asa did at the end of his life. The world has conformed us to its mold, we are living practically as if there is no personal God in the world.

What's our defense against such a prolonged siege of temptation such as this? Paul gives it to us in Romans 12:2. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The thought patterns of our minds- this is the key. They must be renewed. They must be renewed because we were all born dead in trespasses and sins, and there was a period of time in which the world squeezed us into its mold even before we were saved. For some it was not that many years, for others it might have been many decades of years. The mind must be renewed, it must be conformed to God's truth rather than to the Devil's lies about reality. How does this transformation take place?

Turn to Ephesians 5:25-27.

*EPH 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her<sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,<sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

Here we find a beautiful process outlined for us in a section in which Paul is speaking of husband and wife relationships. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How has Christ loved the church? Well, Christ loved the church so much that he gave his life up for her. Now Christ died upon the cross for a purpose, and that purpose was to purchase a bride. This bride that Christ purchased, he purchased out of the slave market of sin. Christ's bride was defiled and degenerate. But Christ's purpose is not only to purchase this bride, but also to cleanse this bride so that he might present her to the father as a

radiant church, without stain, holy and blameless. Now the analogy is quite clear isn't it? Every person who is born again into the family of God comes out of the world's system. The world has already made inroads into forming that person's mind into its mold. But Christ purposes to renew this new creation spiritually, and part of this renewal process has to do with the renewing of the mind. How does this occur? You noticed it in verse 26, didn't you? Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water thru the word.

It should not surprise us that the word of God is critical in the process of our minds being renewed. It should not surprise us because we saw the last times that the word of God was the key defense that Christ used correctly in his temptation with Satan himself and that the living Word of God is our defense against the temptations that come from fleshly desires within. So here again the cleansing power of the word of God on our minds is a key factor in our continuing temptation with the world. Now let me briefly explain how I think that this process takes place.

The devil is a liar, he specializes in convincing others of that which is not the truth. Christ said that the devil was a liar from the beginning. In John 8:44, he said to the religious leaders of his day, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." So then, it should not surprise us that the world's system of thought fathered by Satan himself is filled with lies. Now there is also much truth contained in it, for the devil is an angel of light. Nobody would believe it if there were no truth at all in it, but that truth is so intermingled with lies that the entire philosophy is not centered around God and truth at all but around man and deceptions. So Satan continues to bombard the minds of everyone in the human race with his deceptions and lies. He says, for instance, using the illustration that we used earlier, there is no personal God who is the creator and sustainer of all things here upon the earth. The universe is the product of chance evolution, and man is simply the end of a long evolutionary cycle. Now is this assertion truth or error? Obviously, the entire evolutionary theory of creation is a lie, it is a deception. This universe with all of its complexities could never have happened into

existence. Now there are some truths in an evolutionary philosophy. Plants and animals do change and evolve to better adapt to their surrounding conditions over time. But nothing came into existence in the beginning through the process of evolution. In fact, one of the proven laws of science is that matter itself cannot be created or destroyed – it can only change form. But we are continuously bombarded by our basic existence being dependent upon evolution and other lies every day in our world. What is our defense? Filling our minds with the truth of God's word. You see, as we study God's word a wonderful process takes place. The word cleanses our minds. We become washed with water thru the word. Just like on wash day, when we take that hamper full of filthy, dirty clothing and throw them into the washing machine with soap and bleach, the water in the machine cleanses all of that dirt out of those clothes, so the water of God's truth, His word, cleanses our minds from the error of the world's philosophy. We begin to see its fallacies, and the truth of God replaces the lies of the enemy and our minds are renewed in His truth. Instead of living lives as if God didn't exist, we begin to live our lives in a momentary personal relationship with him as he intended for us to have when he created Adam and Eve and walked with them daily in the coolness of the garden of Eden. Instead of living our lives believing the lie that we are totally independent of God and must make all decisions and judgments in our own wisdom, we begin to live instead continually waiting upon the Lord, drawing from his strength and wisdom. And as we continually fill our minds with God's truth, a wonderful process takes place. Our minds become renewed so that we begin to think God's thoughts after him. So then, having our minds cleansed continually by the word of God, we find that we are not becoming conformed to the pattern of this world, but we are becoming transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Now this process is a continuous one because the temptation from the world is a continuous one. Whereas, the temptation from the devil is a direct attack for a moment, with periods of respite in between, the temptation from the world is continuous. We are constantly living in the world, we are under constant bombardment from the world's system of thought, so there is not a day that goes by that we aren't under the pressure from this temptation. So then, our defense must also be a continual one. We need to realize the daily cleansing that the word can bring to our minds. That is the importance of filling our minds with the

word of God, meditating upon it often, allowing God's truth to replace the deceit and lies that are constantly being thrown at us from all sides.

In the olden days, when the armies of the enemy would attack a city to subdue it, if the enemies' commander found that the city were fortified to the point where he would lose too many men in storming the walls, he would give the command to set up a siege. Now in the siege, the enemy soldiers would just surround the city cutting off all food and water supplies. If a city did not have adequate supplies within, their eventual fall would be assured, and the enemy would win without even firing a shot. So then, the enemy could win with an all out offensive storming of the walls, but could just as readily win with patience, sieging the city until the people ran out of food and water and surrendered.

We are well aware of the all out offenses of the enemy. And we have seen that God has given to us the defense of his word, a timely and direct word from above spoken appropriately in season to disarm the power of the enemy. Now we have to realize that there is also the attack of the siege, the prolonged attempt to wear us down filling our minds with lies and deceits about God. And we cannot escape the siege of the world that is constantly surrounding us for we are living right here within the system of the one who is called 'the god of this age'. But happily, God has given to us the resources that we need to be victorious in this battle also. Just as a city (like Tyre) which had an unending supply of food and water could never be sieged successfully, so we have an unending supply of spiritual nourishment in God's word which continually can cleanse and renew our minds. If we do not avail ourselves of the cleansing power of the word on a daily basis, we will be in danger of being squeezed into the world's mold. But if we allow the word to do its work in our lives, we will become continuously more radiant people, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.