

Temptation #8

The year was 1800. The entire continent of Europe was trembling under the shadow of Napoleon and his ambitions to rule the world. Having already achieved triumphs in Italy and an invasion of Egypt, Napoleon now set his covetous eyes upon Austria. Napoleon surprised everyone with a quick march through the Saint Bernard Pass of the Alps to the border of Austria. It was Easter Morning when he planned to make an attack on the little town of Feldkrich on the Austrian border. The citizens of Feldkrich realized that they were in a hopeless situation. They feebly discussed measures that could be taken for their defense, but in reality there was nothing that they could do to stop the mighty army of Napoleon. Should they just surrender to him? Or should they try to defend themselves and their families as futile as their efforts might be? It was at this point that one of the more spiritually mature members of their town made an unusual suggestion. "This is the day in which we celebrate the Lord's resurrection," he said. "If we rely upon our own strength, we will be sure to fail. Let's ring the bells and worship the Lord as we usually do every Sunday, let's have an Easter celebration in which we rejoice in the risen power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and let's leave the entire matter of Napoleon in God's hands."

Well, the suggestion seemed ludicrous to many, like an ostrich putting its head in the sand. But, really, what else could they do? And so they adopted this rather unusual defense- going to church and worshipping the Lord, and the bells rang loud and clear calling God's people to his house. Little did they realize the effect that their strategy would have on Napoleon. For Napoleon heard the bells peeling from outside the town. He never dreamed that the people would be going to church under such conditions. So in his attempt to figure out the meaning of the bells, he assumed that they were announcing the arrival of Austrian reinforcement troops, and he commanded his troops to break up camp immediately. Napoleon then led his troops in the other direction, away from the city of Feldkrich, and the town was spared from destruction.

The citizens of Feldkirch were very wise to realize that they could not possibly deliver themselves from

their predicament. In their reliance upon the power of the risen Savior they put their faith in their only available source of help. What happened in this historic situation should happen every day of our lives in the spiritual realm. Every day we are confronted with a spiritual battle. *Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world, Paul says, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* As long as we are under the delusion that we can be victorious in our own strength, we are in great danger, for we in fact have less chance of being victorious in these battles than the citizens of Feldkirch would have had attacking Napoleon's army with sticks and clubs. Like them, our power is found in the risen Christ. He is our only defense against the powers of wickedness. So we need to realize this and appropriate the armor that he has provided for our defense.

We began to look at the Armor of God outlined for us in Eph. 6 by the apostle Paul last week. We saw that this armor is not found in some hidden closet revealed mystically only to an elite group of believers, but rather the armor is actually the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and he makes himself available to all who believe on his name. Jesus is the truth, He is our righteousness, he himself is our peace.

Now we saw last time that the place of defense on the body reveals a specific need that we have- these are areas of temptation that the devil loves to invade. And the name given to the piece of armor show's God's provision in Christ for this specific need in our lives.

1. The belt of truth protects the source of our strength. Jesus Christ as our truth gives strength and stability to our lives. We are responsible to be people with strong foundations, stable in a world of turmoil, committed to the truth.

2. The breastplate of righteousness guards the source of our affections. Jesus Christ as our righteousness becomes the focal point of our affections. We are responsible to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls and minds rather than loving the world.

3. Our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace protects our walk thru life. Jesus as our peace enables us to gain victory over anxiety and worry that can dominate our lives. We are responsible as believers to live lives of faith, free from debilitating anxiety and worry.

4. Now notice the 4th piece of armor- the shield of faith. READ 6:16.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Now we must realize which shield Paul is referring to here in order to catch the significance of his statement. There were 2 types of shields that the Roman soldier used. One was a small shield that fit on the arm. This shield was quite mobile and would give a measure of protection in hand to hand combat. The other type of shield was a much larger shield. It was about 4 feet tall and about 2 and half feet wide, and was used in the assault of a city. It was made out of wood often with a metal covering to make it fire-proof. This shield looked very much like a door; in fact the Greek term used for this shield comes from the same root as the Greek word for door. When a Roman army was going to storm a city wall, instead of racing madly toward that wall, potentially losing many soldiers because of the vulnerability of being shot at from atop the wall, the army would move very slowly and carefully using their Thureon, door-like shields as protection. The shields would be side by side all the way across the front of the line, and the soldiers would crouch down behind those shields and move slowly forward. As long as they were behind those shields, the enemy even though in a position of advantage could not touch them, for the flaming arrows would just plunk off the front of the shields.

The fact that God himself is our shield is found numerous places in the Scripture.

You might remember the situation in the Old Testament where Abraham heard of Lot's capture in the invasion of Sodom by the 4 Mesopotamian kings in Gen. 14.

Abraham tracked down these 4 kings who had defeated 5 cities with just 318 men, surprising them and taking back all of the plunder.

But then he began to think, what did I do? They are certainly going to take revenge on me. It was at this point that Abraham began to be anxious and fearful. God came to Abraham saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Gen. 15:1.

When considering the danger of spiritual battle with the enemy, the greatness of wickedness in the

world, it is easy to become fearful. Fear can be the greatest neutralizer of potential. But as we realize that Christ himself is our shield, and as long as we are living consistently with our position in him, we are beyond range of the fiery darts of the enemy, then we can be freed from fear.

The enemy loves to use fear to his advantage- it is an area of weakness in each of us. But Christ as our shield can protect us from those fiery darts. We are responsible as Christians to live lives free from fear, aggressively battling for the Lord just as Abraham did in the O.T.

5. The 5th piece of armor is the helmet of salvation. And again, here, we find a clear reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. David of old said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." And certainly it is clear to each of us that Jesus Christ is our salvation having provided the atonement necessary for the forgiveness of sins thru his death upon the cross.

Now the helmet protects the head where our mind, our intellect, is housed. Our minds need to be engulfed with the assurance and truths of salvation.

God has given to us minds with which to reason, but we must never forget that our minds have been distorted by sin. We are no longer able to reason without error. We must protect our minds with the helmet of Jesus Christ as our salvation.

Illustrations of this truth are found throughout the N.T. especially in the specific temptation that those early Jewish Christians faced. They had been brought up in the teachings of Judaism with an emphasis upon the Mosaic Law. And then the good news of the grace of God in Christ Jesus was introduced to them, and the glorious freedom of the gospel liberated their minds. And for a while the sun shone brightly and they were overjoyed in their new faith. But then the cloud of persecution settled over them, and the temptation came to return back to their former ways of thinking. The recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews were enduring this kind of temptation. In fact, Martin Lloyd Jones in his 6 volume commentary on the book of Ephesians writes, "The Epistle to the Hebrews is nothing, in a sense, but an extended commentary on this phrase - Take unto you the helmet of salvation." Even though this might be an oversimplification for effect, there is great truth in that statement. These early Jewish Christians were wrestling with a decision to return

to their former lifestyle. Like the Israelites who had been delivered from Egypt, they had times of looking back with nostalgia upon the former days. The good old days when the battle wasn't as fierce, when the persecution wasn't as severe, when life appeared to be simpler.

But it was specifically at this time that they needed to realize that Jesus Christ was a helmet of salvation for them. And so the writer of Hebrews speaks concerning the centrality of Jesus Christ- how that he is greater than the angels, greater than Moses, greater than the priests of the old covenant, greater than anything else that was offered to them in their former way of life. Jesus Christ had provided the perfect redemption. And their assurance of this salvation was to be their protective helmet against the satanic attacks upon their minds.

We have a similar temptation today. The enemy often comes enticing us with the herbs and spices of Egypt. He tries to ruin our testimonies by enticing us back to our former ways of life. Our defense is our recognition of the complete perfection of Jesus Christ and the assurance of our salvation in him.

And we each have a weakness in which the enemy can fill our minds with doubts. Our defense again is the Lord Jesus Christ himself who is our salvation, who gives us assurance of our eternal relationship with himself. So we have a responsibility as followers of Christ to be firm in our commitment to him, assured of our eternal life which he has freely given to us.

6. We come now to the 6th piece of armor- the sword of the spirit. READ 6:17.

<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Now the word is the clearest expression that we have. When we want to accurately express ourselves to someone else, we tell them how we feel. Our words express our character, our feelings, and what we are thinking. So then, our word is an extension of ourselves. Furthermore, our word represents our being. When we desire to commit ourselves to buying a home or a car, we sign our names to the dotted line and our word commits our character to the fulfillment of our promise to pay for the item purchased. So then, the word is very important because it is an expression of our character and ultimately our power, for while that feeble piece of paper with our names scrawled out on it has no inherent power in itself, all of our resources

and power have been committed because that paper contains our word.

So it is with God himself. God is an infinite spirit, completely without any limitations whatsoever. He is infinite in power, in glory, in holiness, in righteousness, in knowledge, in love, and in every other attribute which he possesses. But we would have never known God unless he chose to reveal himself to us, and he does so thru expressions of himself, or thru his word. The word of God is the very expression of his divine character; it contains all of the power and commitment of God himself.

As we have already seen, there are 2 in the Bible who claim the title, "the word of God". There is the Bible itself. Throughout the O.T. the expression "thus spoke the Lord" or "the word of God came to Isaiah", etc. are very common expressions. And the N.T. continues this theme letting us know that the Bible is the written word of God. Heb. 4:12 says, *for the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit.* So then the Bible is the written word of God. It is not that mere printed letters on paper have any power in themselves, so the Bible is not to be worshipped as an idol that one might bow down to. But the fact that the Bible is the word of God means that it is the very expression of God himself. Therefore, promises in the Bible are God's commitment to us, they are His very expressions. Warnings in the Bible are God's admonitions, they are His very expressions. Doctrines in the Bible are God's teachings; they are His very instructions to us.

The second who is called the word of God is Jesus Christ himself. John 1:1 says, *in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. 1:14- and the word became flesh and dwelt among us.* Jesus Christ coming as the God-man was the very expression of deity himself, he was God in flesh.

Now these 2 expressions of God are critical for us to see in regards to our defense in temptation. One is a book, the other is a person. One is written, the other is living. One we read and study- it is objective. We can interpret its truth. It is the same for everyone. It guards us from mysticism and being carried away with our emotional desires. The other we experience in a relationship - it is subjective. This relationship is completely different for everybody, for God deals with us all as individuals. But this relationship with Christ guards us from dead intellectualism.

There is no contradiction between the two of them, for they both alike are the word of God. The Bible teaches us truth about Christ, and our relationship with Christ causes us to grow in our love for and obedience to the Bible. They are a check and balance system for our spiritual growth. And they form the only offensive weapon that we have against the enemy. You noticed that, didn't you? All of the other weapons are defensive, but the sword while being able to be used defensively, can also be used as an offensive weapon.

When we use the Bible properly, as we saw in the example of Christ in his temptation, the Devil must flee from our presence. And when we appropriate the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ to our lives properly, the power of the inner flesh is broken, and we have victory over the inner battle. The written word gives us power for victory over the outer battle, the living word gives us power for victory over the inner battle.

We must be confident in the power of the word, both the written and living, and we must know and use the word for in doing so we are actually expressing confidence in God himself

It was just a couple of years after the Civil War, that an elderly war veteran used to wander from place to place, begging for a bite to eat, and always ready to talk of the glories of his contribution to the war. It was obvious that he couldn't work- for he was too old for physical labor and had some war injuries as well. But what really tickled people was the fact that he was always talking about his friend, "Mr. Lincoln." It was Mr. Lincoln who told him this and Mr. Lincoln told him that, and finally it was just too much for one fellow. "You keep saying that you knew President Lincoln so well", he finally said. "I'm not so sure that you know him at all. Can you prove that Mr. Lincoln is your friend, or that he even knows you at all?"

Well, the old veteran responded to the challenge. "Sure I can prove it," he said, as he took from his pocket his wallet. After he had opened his wallet, he unfolded a piece of paper that had obviously been worn from being taken out of the wallet many times. "Here is a piece of paper that Mr. Lincoln himself signed, and he gave it to me in person," the veteran claimed proudly. The skeptic took the paper, looked at it, and then looked again. "Don't you realize what you have here? You have a generous federal pension

signed by the President himself. You don't have to go around begging for food. This pension would meet all of your needs."

How many times Christians go around spiritually like this old Civil war veteran. God has given to us all that we need to thrive spiritually- we have the written and living word of God. Christ has provided all that we need for victory over sin thru his atoning work upon the cross that crushed the head of the serpent. Christ offers himself as our defense and armor. He will be our belt of truth, our breastplate of righteousness, our shoes of peace, our shield of faith, our helmet of salvation, our sword of the spirit. But we must appropriate these provisions to the spiritual battle. We do this by faith as we saw last week. We believe God's word to be true and choose to put it into practice in our lives. Just as we believed God's promise and received it into our lives personally in order to become a member of God's family, so we now believe God's word as to the position that we have in Christ and live in light of it in order to live a victorious Christian life. We desire to grow in our relationship with Christ so we experience his provision in each of these areas. We realize the power of the cross in our lives, believe our position in Christ to be true and live in light of that position. We study and know God's word so that we can use it as the sword that it is intended to be.

God designed the Christian life to be a living, growing, personal relationship. This is the reason for Christ comparing his relationship with us to a vine and branches. Just as there is a living, dependent union in a vine, so there is to be that kind of relationship between us and Christ.

As we appropriate our position in Jesus Christ, as we believe as true the power of the crucifixion in our lives, as we yield our bodies as instruments of righteousness unto God, then Jesus Christ himself the living word of God becomes our defense against the enemy. He fills our minds with the confidence of his truth, he fills our hearts with his righteousness and places within us the desire to please him in all that we do, he enables us to walk life's road with the peace and tranquility that surpasses human understanding, he protects us from the fiery darts that would naturally strike fear to our hearts, he assures us of his eternal life that dwells within so that our doubts are conquered, and he gives to us the very power of God himself in our battle with the enemy.

As long as we try to advance against the enemy in our own strength, we will be doomed to defeat. But as we foster that living, dependent relationship with Christ, we will find strength for battle that will help us to be victorious.