

Week 38

The World, The Flesh and The Devil

Key Verse

1 Peter 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

+ Introduction

Baseball, often called America's favorite pastime, provides many life illustrations, especially when it comes to coaching kids. Think of the catcher, for example, who has gear that no other player wears: helmet, mask, throat guard, chest protector, and shin guards. The gear must be worn in order to protect the player from things like a fastball coming at him at 80+ mph, foul tips, balls thrown in the dirt, etc. A boy just learning how to play catcher will invariably make the same mistake when a ball skips in the dirt in front of him: he will flinch and turn his head away. It is a natural instinct because he does not want to get hit in the face by the ball. Coaches must always remind him that all of the protection is on the **front** of the body; if you turn your head away or turn your back, you might get hit in an unprotected area. If a ball skips in the dirt in front of you, hold your ground and let your equipment do what it is designed to do - protect you.

In the Christian life, we have been issued protective equipment: our salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, faith, truth, our integrity, to name a few. Ephesians 6:10-17 describes it as the "*full armor of God*." Why do we need this gear? Because we are in a battle, and our enemies are spiritual, not physical. As believers, we are called to a battlefield, not a playground or a country club.

In today's lesson, we will look at how sin affects our lives in the form of our three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil - sometimes called the "unholy trinity." We are in a spiritual battle every day of our Christian lives, and victory begins with understanding our enemy.

Avery Willis states, "We are in a spiritual battle with the kingdom of darkness. We live behind enemy lines, and we face the forces of Satan." ¹ Phrases like "kingdom of darkness" and "forces of Satan" can disturb us. We need to avoid two extremes: (1) to become fascinated with Satan and the forces of evil to the point that we feel like Satan causes everything negative that happens to us; that is, demons are behind every tree. (2) to ignore Satan and evil forces as if they do not exist. Either of these extremes is unbiblical and can lead to disaster.

As we study our three enemies, remember that they overlap, they work as a team, with Satan being the quarterback calling the plays. As 2 Corinthians 2:11 says, *"...in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes."* So, what are his schemes? Let us take a look at how he works in our world.

+ The World

1 JOHN 2:15-17 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever.*

We live, work, play and raise our kids in the world that is broken yet not forsaken. Here is the question: How can we avoid the impact of it? First, let us define the term "world" biblically, then we can determine how to combat the enemy.

As the term is used in 1 John and other passages, "world" means an organized system in opposition and rebellion against God. Notice how John describes the "world" in verse 16: *"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life."* He clearly says that these things are not from the Father; they work against our relationship with the Lord. Let us break them down further for understanding:

- **Lust of the flesh:** sinful longings for physical pleasure like sexual sin, alcohol, drugs, gluttony, to name a few.
- **Lust of the eyes:** where the sinful longings entice us through what we see, things with a visual appeal like money, possessions, pornography, materialism, "bling." Material things could be clothes, cars, houses, boats, electronics, media, and on and on. Are material things wrong in and of themselves? No, we have to use material things to function in this world. But, a worldly attitude desires and accrues the top of the line, most advanced car or gadget or house to be happy or satisfied. A worldly person in the context of lust of the eyes, covets possessions.
- **The boastful pride of life:** Pride is often commended in the world, and ambition is considered more of a virtue than a vice. It means boasting in arrogance and exalting ourselves. Check your motives. With your EGO, you are either "edging God out" or "exalting God only."

In verse 17, we are reminded that *"the world is passing away."* The things of this world are temporary. Whatever you must have, whatever you crave, starts depreciating as soon as you get it. Things do not satisfy the way you thought they would; the joy is fleeting.

How can the Christian gain victory over the world? Three passages of Scripture can help us understand:

- **1 John 2:15** explains, *“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* We are not to love the world nor the things in the world. We must continually guard ourselves against falling in love and obsessing over the world and what it offers – passions, pleasures, possessions. How does this work? Are we not to have nice things? Drive a clunker? Wear hand-me-down clothes? Live in a dump? Give all of our money to missions? No, not necessarily. Here can be the problem – we can become proud that we live a sparse lifestyle, and pride is a sin! Trust the Lord, be thankful for what you have, enjoy material things but do not obsess over them, and live to glorify the Lord.
- **Romans 12:2** says, *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Do not let the world shape your values. As believers, our value system is governed by God’s Word, first and foremost. God’s Word is part of our protective equipment. Evaluate yourself using Scripture, not the world’s standards. We are to seek to convert the world, not vice-versa.
- **Galatians 6:14** states, *“But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* So Paul is telling us to brag about the cross of Jesus Christ and consider ourselves as dead to the world’s temptations. Yes, those temptations from the world are real; they are attractive; they entice us to sin. But remember, as a believer, you can refuse temptation through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are never put in a position in which we have to sin.

✦ The Flesh

The Bible uses the term "flesh" in 2 ways. One means our physical body – skin, bones, muscles, ligaments. John 1:14 says that *“...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* The Word is Jesus Christ; when it says that He became flesh, He became a man, a human being with a physical body. Even though some temptations and sins are manifested through our physical body, body parts do not sin on their own accord.

The second way flesh is used in the Bible is as an enemy and a tool of Satan. The "flesh" refers to our sin nature. A believer in Jesus Christ is saved, forgiven, and on his way to heaven. However, he still retains his sin nature – a bent to sin. We have a propensity to disobey God and put our self-interests above God’s interests.

GALATIANS 5:16-21 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰ idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Not a pretty picture! Now, two things to keep in mind about the flesh:

1. The flesh will always be with us; we will struggle with it until we go to be with the Lord.
2. The flesh never gets any better; we cannot reform the flesh. It never wants to do the right and godly thing. No matter how long you have been a believer, no matter how much you have studied God's Word, the flesh never gets any better. There will never be a time in which you can put your Christian life on autopilot or cruise control. If you do, you have already started the downward spiral into sin. Therefore, we must constantly be on our guard.

How can we gain victory over the flesh? Three primary ways:

- **GALATIANS 5:16** tells us, *"...walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."* Notice that it does NOT say that the desire goes away; it says that you will not carry it out if you walk by the Spirit. The desire is the temptation, which is not a sin – Jesus was tempted. Every believer in Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit indwelling him. The Holy Spirit is part of our protective gear. To "walk by the Spirit" means to live our lives in dependence upon Him. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to say no to the flesh and yes to God.
- **ROMANS 6:6, 11-13** tells us, *"knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ¹¹ So you too, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore sin is not to reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and your body's parts as instruments of righteousness for God.*

These verses explain that as believers, **we are no longer slaves to sin**; that is, when we are tempted (and we will be), we never **have** to sin. Realize that you can choose to resist sin and obey God! Romans 8:12 continues, *"so then, brothers and sisters, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – ¹³ for if you are living in accord with the flesh, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are not under obligation to live according to the flesh. Our old self was crucified with Christ, and we are no longer slaves to sin.

- **ROMANS 13:14** provides, *but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.* Verse 13 mentions deeds of the flesh; verse 14 gives the solution. First, **"put on" the Lord Jesus Christ**, which means to conduct yourself as one who has committed himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you put on a garment, it is what people see. If you put on Jesus Christ, people should see Christlike behavior. The second command is **to make no provision for the flesh**, that is, do not be thinking and planning how to gratify your fleshly desires.

That covers the two main temptations of the enemy, the world and the flesh. Now, let us deal with him directly.

+ The Devil

1 PETER 5:8 *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

The devil is the quarterback who calls the plays of the “unholy trinity.” We first saw him as the tempter in the Garden of Eden. We must not underestimate this enemy nor give him more credit than he deserves. Satan is neither omnipotent nor omniscient; he cannot be omnipresent. The devil is a created being, created by God. There can be two extremes in dealing with Satan. The first view believes that he exists but is like a cartoon character we can laugh at and dismiss because he is relatively harmless. The second extreme is to be deathly afraid of Satan, to believe he is behind every negative thing – every cold, every ailment, every weakness we may have. This view includes blaming all of our ills, temptations and sins on him with the mantra, “the devil made me do it.” Both extremes are unbiblical and can lead to disaster.

Though we cannot do an exhaustive study of Satan here, we can look at a few of his characteristics to better understand our adversary. Our main Scripture is 1 Peter 5:8 above. It pictures Satan as a roaring lion. Why does a lion roar? Because he is hungry and to scare his prey. A lion’s roar can be heard up to 5 miles away – talk about scary! ² Peter calls the devil “our adversary” – he is not our friend! We are not to negotiate with him.

Further, in this passage, he is characterized as being on the prowl, actively seeking victims. What does he want to do? He wants to “devour” us. We, as believers, are his prey and his goals are to compromise our influence in the world, cause us to live fruitless lives, and ultimately kill us.

In John 8:44, Jesus calls him “a murderer” and “a liar,” in responding to a group of Jews who were resisting His message, “*you are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.*”

In 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, Paul describes false teachers who are deceitful and disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. He then says, “...*even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*” Paul also describes the false teachers as Satan’s servants. Revelation 12:9-10 refers to Satan as the one “who deceives the whole world,” and “the accuser of the brethren.” He does so by imitating the work of God through counterfeit and camouflage. One of his tactics is to accuse us, make us feel guilty, and discourage us. In fact, one of his most powerful tools is discouragement. Spiritual deception is indeed his most insidious weapon. ³

Here are a few Scripture passages that illustrate his attempt to imitate God:

Jesus is the “*Prince of Peace,*” (Isaiah 9:6).

Satan is “*the prince of this world,*” (John 12:31, 14:30,16:11).

Jesus is “*the light of the world,*” (John 9:5).

Satan is transformed into “*an angel of light*” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Jesus Christ is *"the Lord my God,"* (Zechariah 14:5).

Satan is *"the god of this age"* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Jesus is *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah,"* (Revelation 5:5).

Satan is *"a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,"* 1 Peter 5:8. ⁴

What is our response? How can we gain victory over Satan? Jesus gives us the perfect example of how to respond to Satan in Matthew.

MATTHEW 4:1-11 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." ⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took Him along into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and he said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written: 'He will give His angels orders concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will lift You up, So that You do not strike Your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written: 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took Him along to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to serve Him.

Jesus went one-on-one, mano-a-mano, face to face with Satan. Did He argue using logic? No – Jesus quoted Scripture. Three times Satan tempted Him, and all three times, Jesus said, *"It is written..."* and then quoted specific Scripture from Deuteronomy: 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13. Jesus, God in human flesh, used the same Scriptures that we can use in the face of the enemy. Jesus used the same protective equipment available to us: *"...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"*(Ephesians 6:17).

How can we defeat Satan? By reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word so that we can call it to mind as needed. God's Word transforms us, corrects us, and keeps us on the right track (2 Timothy 3:16). Furthermore, Paul specifies in Ephesians 6:14-17, six pieces of spiritual armor that we are to put on daily to protect us from his schemes:

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness
- The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace
- The Shield of Faith
- The Helmet of Salvation
- The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God

We fight the battle as ones with hope, not simply wishing that Jesus will return in victory but knowing with confidence and certainty that Jesus has already fought the battle and won!

+ Conclusion

As believers in Jesus Christ, we live in a world that is hostile to the things of God. We must be prepared to give an answer for the hope that lives within us (1 Peter 3:15), all the while understanding the schemes of our enemy and how to combat against them. Spiritual armor is only useful if we put it on! It is our responsibility to appropriate it in our lives. God has given us everything we need in Christ to fight the good fight as victors, not victims.

In his book, *The Spiritual Warfare Answer Book*, David Jeremiah quotes "The Warrior's Prayer," printed below that can help us to start each day ready for battle:

Heavenly Father,

Your warrior prepares for battle.

Today I claim victory over Satan by putting on the whole armor of God!

I put on the Girdle of Truth!

May I stand firm in the truth of Your Word

so I will not be a victim of Satan's lies.

I put on the Breastplate of Righteousness!

May it guard my heart from evil

so I will remain pure and holy,

protected under the blood of Jesus Christ!

I put on the Shoes of Peace!

May I stand firm in the Good News of the Gospel

so Your peace will shine through me

and be a light to all I encounter.

I take the Shield of Faith!

May I be ready for Satan's fiery darts of

doubt, denial and deceit

so I will not be vulnerable to spiritual defeat.

I put on the Helmet of Salvation!

May I keep my mind focused on You

so Satan will not have a stronghold in my thoughts.

I take the Sword of the Spirit!

May the two-edged sword of Your Word

be ready in my hands

so I can expose the tempting words of Satan.

By faith Your warrior has put on the whole armor of God!

I am prepared to live this day in spiritual victory!

Amen.

¹ Avery T. Willis Jr. *MasterLife Book 3 The Disciple's Victory*, Lifeway Press, 1996, p.9.

² <https://www.clevelandzoosociety.org/z/2021/02/23/truth-or-tail-a-lions-roar-can-be-heard-5-miles-away> ³ Davide Jeremiah, *The Spiritual Warfare Answer Book*, Thomas Nelson, 2016, p.41.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.45.