

THE



“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

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SIN’S BATTLEFIELD

Sin has not changed, but the battlefield upon which we fight it has. Temptation to serve our own desires and sin has been around since Eden. The root of these desires is no different, “...*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16), but its method of delivery and access has certainly changed over time. Like most technological advancements, there are both great benefits we once could not imagine possible yet unintended consequences bringing their own problems. Access to sinful sights, sounds, and ideas are now no farther away than our pockets or purses which hold our

THE HARVESTER
141 County Road 474
Woodland, AL 36280
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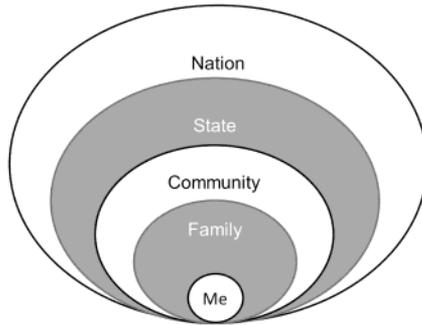


smartphones. Combine the ease of access with living in a time of immediate gratification, and through our phones we see generations striving for quick fame and recognition along with temptations of innumerable lewd videos, images, and songs. This is just one example, and this does not mean new technologies are inherently evil. Rather, this ease of access to sin combined with a changing world around us has brought about a different battlefield in which we combat sin.

For those of us living in the United States, much of the structure in the founding of the country was rooted in a moral, God-believing environment. A group of people wanting the freedom to practice their worship to God came to the country. They formed a community with similar beliefs. They raised children with these beliefs. These children grew up playing with children from similar families and had children of their own. The cycle continued. Over time there were variations in beliefs, but in a simplified summary, communities were formed based on similarities of these beliefs in morals found in the Bible. Fast forward a few hundred years, and more variations persisted, but there are those of us who can remember growing up in a time and place where your neighbor, classmates, coworker, butcher, bus driver, mayor, judge, sheriff, congressional representative, and state governor were not entirely dissimilar from you. That is, at minimal there was probably a shared belief in God. We likely differed in how we worshipped and, sure, there have always been those whose actions often were incongruent with Godly thoughts. Still, despite many differences, there was a time when a belief in God and morality led by the Bible was shared from inside the house to the community, the state, the region, and the nation by-in-large. This meant we had quite a large base of support to combat the threat of immorality brought by sin's temptation.

Visualize a large circle; this is your nation. Inside of it is a smaller circle; this is your state, province, or region. Inside this circle is yet a smaller circle; this is your town or communi-

ty. Inside of this circle is another one; this is your family. Finally, there's a tiny dot in the center; this is you. Everything in the circle outside of you can be your safety net, or it can draw you away.



The world has changed. If we look outward from ourselves and our families, the Biblical foundation of our current communities and regions no longer resemble the ones in which we were raised. Now, we're likely to come across completely differing beliefs regarding God at all of the levels of our environment - likely ranging from complete disbelief in God to a passing belief with only some evidenced in their words and actions. In terms of a common belief in God and that we shape our lives accordingly, those circles outside of us hardly resemble us anymore. Our beliefs and behaviors are shaped by the environment around us. We're likely to live according to what we see around us, for better or worse. By no means does this mean that if we were raised surrounded by abject immorality we are hopeless, nor does it mean if we're raised in a Christian environment then we have an automatic ticket to salvation stamped. However, there is clearly an advantage in having an environment to support us and help keep us on the right path (Pro. 22:6).

As this world has changed, the battlefield in which we combat sin has changed. With so many differences in beliefs, the battle against temptations is no longer fought at the community level or higher. In some cases, these battles may no longer be fought

at the family level. When the circles surrounding us no longer share our beliefs, we can start to feel isolated in our struggles with sin. Combined with the aforementioned proximity of temptation we face today (as close as our pockets), this can make our struggles seem like very lonely affairs. In World War I, war itself was the same as it had always been: a deadly conflict between opposing sides. What made it particularly deadly was how drastically weapons technology had advanced yet the battlefield tactics had not changed with them. Broadly, this led to trench warfare and “no man’s land,” until new tactics were developed. Similarly, the rapid change in temptation and sin’s accessibility along with the deteriorating beliefs in the community levels around us have led us to a potential spiritual trench warfare. Sin is the same, but many times we’re attempting to fight it alone. Additionally, we may already see persecution on the horizon. We tend to view persecution as something experienced only by groups of people, but it affects us individually as well. Persecution is simply an active attempt to restrict or remove freedom in some manner. By this definition, sin persecutes us as individuals, because it restricts us from being free from sin and able to live unto God (Rom. 6:6-10). Thus, we need to develop new tactics at two levels: 1) support within our community; and 2) self-control within ourselves.

As communities would come together and build barns, so too would a community come together to protest and oppose when evil attempted to enter. The community would aid those who needed a helping hand, whether with prayer or a literal helping hand. No community of any size can prevent

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The Harvester

141 County Road 474 * Woodland, AL 36280

Phone: (256) 449-9221* Email: theharvesteronline@gmail.com

Web Page: www.churches-of-christ.org

temptation from reaching an individual, but it sure makes an impact when many people within someone's daily environment set a living example of doing and saying what is right while eschewing that which is wrong. This was the children of Israel at its strongest as a united people. Especially when led by David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22, 1 Sam. 13:14), the nation was most protected from the evils without while propagating the Godly beliefs within. The tribes of Israel surely differed as distant cousins, but the center of the lives across the varying tribes was God. Even after the kingdom divided, the southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin had successful years when God was revered throughout, from the king down to priests, to families and to the individual. The strength and success was never based on shared genetics, but rather on shared values in serving God. Similarly to this day, our hope of access to the opportunity of salvation is not based on any genetics, but rather based on the promise set forth (Rom. 9:7-8). God commanded the formation and protection of these shared values in the children of Israel by prohibiting intermarriage with different peoples - again, not due to any genetic differences, but because the influx of values greatly differing from serving the one true God would weaken the Israelites:

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. (Deu. 7:1-4)

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. (1 Kings 11:1-2)

In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?" (Neh. 13:23-27)

Who comprises our community? Hopefully in the smallest circle outside of ourselves, our family is of a shared belief in God and serving Him. Next, should be our congregation. Do we lean upon each other enough? Do we support each other enough? Unfortunately, in our current mode of spiritual trench warfare, it often seems as our congregations are a collection of the smallest circles, the individuals. We exchange the pleasantries, get through the worship service, and go about our business for the ensuing week. I say this as one guilty of doing so. Paul indicates one of the true values of a congregation coming together is to share our interpretations and experiences, given we have a wide variety of strengths that can

come together to contribute to the group (1 Cor. 12:12-31). In today's world the congregation provides what is becoming unfortunately rare: people who believe as we do. This is one of our communities, and one we must strengthen.

As we see the world change around us, the beliefs, actions, and morals rooted in God's Word become less common around us. This does not mean we give up. We still have a duty to try to grow our community and spread God's Word so that we increase those who share the same belief in God:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? (Rom. 10:14)

That said, there are times and places, where our most intimate communities, the family and congregation, are at risk due to the shrinking Godly community and the rising sinfulness around us - similarly to Lot's family in Sodom (Gen. 18 and 19). Perhaps in these times, we may need a new environment. Due to our attachment to family homes, locations, and our history there, we find ourselves seeing the community around us change while refusing to leave it. In doing so, we risk becoming Lot's family in Sodom. Moving isn't easy, but for some of us, perhaps it's what is needed. There may come a time when we need each other, because in the face of persecution from external sources, our community of the Church will be the only support we may find. Building up and strengthening our community is just one important tactic in combating sin. God has always wanted His people to form together with a unified purpose of serving Him, and help each other serve Him, protecting from the outside influences that threaten this purpose. Still, we have individual purposes and responsibilities to resist the persecution of sin. Lord willing next month, we will talk about the tactics we must develop as an individual on the ever changing battlefield against sin.

BEN

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
August 6 - 8	Rainsville Rainsville, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Whose mother found him a wife from Egypt?
2. Which prophet of God told Naaman to wash in the river Jordan to cure his leprosy?
3. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, who was the second man to pass by the robbed man?
4. What did Jesus eat to convince the disciples that he was indeed raised from the dead?
5. What relation was Lois to Timothy?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH...

And remember last month's questions?

1. On which mountain range did Noah's ark come to rest?
ARARAT (Gen. 8:4)
2. According to Old Testament law, what should you not cook a young goat in? ITS MOTHER'S MILK (Exo. 23:19)
3. Whose hair when cut annually weighed two hundred shekels by the king's weight? ABSALOM (2 Sam. 14:26)
4. In what town did Jesus turn water into wine?
CANA (John 2:1-11)
5. To which Jewish sect did Nicodemus belong?
PHARISEES (John 3:1)