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“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)

October 2021

No. 430

SIN’S BATTLEFIELD: GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Despite the changing battlefield surrounding us in our un-
changed conflict with sin and temptation, God has provided
the support we need to adapt to any situation. The rapidly
changing technology providing access to sin at any given mo-
ment combined with the moral decaying in the institutions
surrounding us may leave us feeling both alone and helpless.
The pace at which people, from corporations down to commu-
nities, stopped resisting sin is astounding. Gone are the times
when even if multiple “sides” could not agree on policies and

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ideas, there was “common decency.” So, we feel small in number when the sights and sounds from people around us are more likely in promotion of sin than in decrying it. Many of these same people have replaced God with politics and movements, and as such, are searching for moral guidance from politicians more than God’s word. Spoiler alert: you will not find good moral guidance in politics. The search for fulfillment and satisfaction can only be found in God, as we noted last month. However, how do we prove victorious over temptation in our daily battles in these times when things are so different than they once were? There are no explicit examples or direct commandments about how to handle lewd viral videos spreading around social media, or “music” glorifying promiscuity and depravity, because the technological mediums in which we view or listen to them were not around 2000 years ago. Fortunately, regardless of the situation and support around us, God has provided what we need to develop a mindset adaptable to any way in which temptation presents itself. This extends beyond overcoming temptations to encouraging us when it seems as if all around us are against us.

We usually consider Ephesians 6 and being outfitted as a soldier of Christ, which most certainly applies. However, there is an underlying, pervasive mentality that we must maintain beneath that armor on the rapidly changing battlefield of sin. Most specifically, how do we most effectively wield our shield of faith (Eph. 6:16) so that our faith indeed protects us in these times, when the protective walls of the community have fallen and the individuals are searching for satisfaction everywhere other than God? Although we can find it throughout the scripture, in his writing to the Romans, Paul succinctly identifies three things we must have in mind to aid us when faced with temptation: 1) God is our Heavenly Father; 2) the perspective of eternity; and 3) the Spirit’s intercession on our behalf.

“Heavenly Father” is a phrase we use often and many of us have heard this all of our lives. We must not take this for

granted. Considering God - as He is in his might and glory, all-seeing and all-knowing to the extent of having the hairs of our head numbered (Mat. 10:30) - as a parental figure offers us a tremendous motivation to say “no” when presented with temptation. When we are very young, in our small view of the world, our parents or guardians set the rules and boundaries in our small world. If we violate the rules and exceed those boundaries set for us, it is our parents who deliver the consequences. This forms how we approach opportunities to break those rules. Thus, if we know our parents/guardians are watching, we have motivation to avoid breaking the rules. This relationship extends beyond punishing consequences. It brings great joy to young children to know when they’ve pleased their parents or whomever they deeply admire. This is a relationship many of us understand having experienced it ourselves. However, to the Roman reader Paul is addressing in his letter, this was often not the case. Many in Rome lived a life of slavery or servitude, which meant they were essentially property of Roman citizens across multiple wealth classes, but particularly the rich. For poorer people at this time, it wasn’t uncommon to sell their children to richer neighbors. This was also contingent on the child even being accepted into the family in which they were born. The oldest living male of the family estate had the ultimate right to decide whether newborn babies were kept. If he chose not to accept the baby born into the family, the baby was abandoned outside - often where it was picked up and taken to be raised a slave. As you can imagine, Rome was filled with “orphaned” children and those who grew up near or from that background. So, it is not a small statement Paul makes when telling the Roman reader that there is a parental figure awaiting those who “...are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). That is, those who have put their fleshly sinful life to death (Rom. 6:6) now walk in newness of spirit with no more desire to serve the flesh but to serve God:

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom. 6:11-14)

This parental figure aids us in being servants of righteousness rather than sin:

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Rom. 8:12-17)

God will adopt you. Adoption meant something slightly different to the Romans of the time of Paul's writings than it does to us today. Today we think of fairly young children who are being adopted for a variety of reasons too exhaustive to list, but generally adopted by those without their own biologi-

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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cal children. However, Roman adoption was common for those with biological children. Many affluent Romans commonly adopted, especially if they were politicians or had political ambitions. Frequently the biological children raised in a rich environment were spoiled, and as is often the case with spoiled children, due to their behavior they were not seen as viable heirs. That is, they were too spoiled and immature to carry on the name of the family. These Roman fathers would look elsewhere for an heir - adoption. Again in contrast to how we view modern adoption practices, it was not young children who were being considered for adoption. These were often adults being adopted. This was all fairly common - many Roman emperors were adopted under these circumstances.

Adoption was almost always an improvement in life for the adopted. The debts accrued under the adopted's former name were erased. All outstanding debts and obligations were gone, and the adopted started with a new slate under their new family. Everything of the former life was left behind, even family. This was a complete separation between the old life and the new - just as in severing our servitude to sin to serve our new master alone, God. The new bond between the adopted and the adopter was now inseparable by the adopter. The biological children could be disowned, kicked out, and cut off at any time, but the adopted could not. If the adopted left, it was of his or her own accord, but the adopter must take them back in, should they wish to return - think of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). This is our heavenly Father. He will freely choose us and will not reject us as long as we join in Christ's death and resurrection to serve Him and not the former life we have chosen to put away.

By the faith we have in Him and this relationship, we now have parental guidance in times of facing sin and temptation. This gives us support, and this is where reliance on the law failed. As we know all too well, just because there is a written rule or law does not mean it is being followed. Just as today's society increasingly views politicians and movements as its

religion, it views laws as its moral guidance. Jesus noted the Pharisees knew the law very well, yet they were ultimately living after it hypocritically more than serving its creator, God (Mat. 23:3). Rules by themselves are weak, and if we rely on them to stop us from giving into temptation, we will fail. Now under the new covenant under grace rather than an enumerated list of rules, we are under the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2 and called the perfect law of liberty by James [1:25, 2:12]). How then do we combat temptation and sin without explicit laws? How do we know what God would have us do today with access to sin in ways that did not exist 2000 years ago?

God is our Heavenly Father. That is the answer. As often as we have used that phrase in our prayers and have heard it all of our lives, we need to live it. Consider our earthly parents. As we grow older, we have found ourselves alone and without parental supervision in situations where they did not have a direct, specific rule about the situation. They didn't technically have a rule about this specific television show, this exact song, or this particular group of people. However, if our parents were to walk in during the situation, we know in our hearts whether they would be disappointed or proud of us in that moment. No rule existed, yet we know whether our actions would displease or please them. We know this, because we developed a close relationship with them and grew to understand that which pleased or displeased them. This is the relationship we're to seek with God. We do not need the years of experience we had with our fleshly parents to understand that which pleases and displeases God. We have the Word of God, which includes a history of those who pleased and displeased God across patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations.

In addition to the inherent weakness of rules and laws, they're only minimally effective when there is someone to enforce them. What about when we're alone? We've noted with the societal structures morally crumbling around us, our battle with sin and temptation can feel so isolated. The technologies of

today allow us to carry easy access to all kinds of sights and sounds - ranging from completely innocent to entirely vile - to unseen corners. With smartphones, sin is portable and easily hidden by leaning over just the right way. It almost seems as if we can get away with it since nobody can see. However, once again, we must remember God - all-knowing and all-seeing - is our Heavenly Father. The same respect we have had for our parents, grandparents, bosses, or anyone in a mentoring or guardianship position in our lives, we need to have for God. That respect was a fear of consequences when we violated their rules and a satisfaction in pleasing them when we fulfilled rules. Hopefully the respect did not leave once they left the room and we were now out of their rule-enforcing sight. Now, we must know that God is always watching. In the hope of God's adoption about which Paul writes, we are offered the ultimate motivation to make the right choices when battling temptation and sin placed in front of us. In adopting us, God will be the parent who freely chose us, will not disown us (as long as we serve Him), and always be with us - even when we think we're alone. This means in our moments of temptation, we still have a parent who we know we can displease or please based on our actions. Furthermore, we know of the consequences awaiting us when we displease Him and the reward for pleasing Him. Specifically, Paul notes the adoption brings us the same inheritance God's son received - an eternal home in Heaven with him.

When we're young, if we're blessed with Godly parents, we have a much easier time avoiding what is wrong and choosing what is right. God provides us the same as we get older and feel more isolated. This is just one way in which God provides us the support and motivates us as we face temptation and sin while the world around us falls farther from Him. Lord willing, next month we will discuss how the perspective of eternity and the Spirit's intercession on our behalf further support us in the unchanging battle upon sin's changing battlefield.

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
October 2 - 3	Freefield Stateline, MS	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
October 7 - 10	Mount Zion Crab Orchard, KY	Mark Carpenter, Timothy Lewis, Danny Griffin, & Thad Eubank

Masks are recommended at these meetings. Information may be subject to change. Please check the website calendar for the latest updates.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Which creature tricked Eve into eating of the forbidden fruit?
2. Whose mother placed him in an ark of bulrushes?
3. Who was David's father?
4. Who else, other than the wise men, came to visit Jesus when he was a small child?
5. What animals did Jesus cause to run into the sea and drown?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH...

And remember last month's questions?

1. Who was Noah's father? LAMECH (Gen. 5:28-29)
2. Which tribe of Israel received no inheritance of land? LEVI (Deu. 10:9)
3. Which woman was a seller of purple goods? LYDIA (Acts 16:14)
4. What nationality was Timothy's father? GREEK (Acts 16:1)
5. Who did Paul write a letter to concerning his slave Onesimus? PHILEMON (Phm. 1:1-25)