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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)

November 2021

No. 431

SIN’S BATTLEFIELD: PERCEPTION

God has provided the support we need as we’re surrounded by a changing battlefield in our unchanged conflict with sin and temptation. We just may not have recognized it, or we may have even forgotten it. Last month, we recognized we may face uncertainty with understanding how we should approach temptation when it is greeting us in ways we have never seen before. Temptation is approaching us not only in ways unfamiliar to us, but it also seems the people and institutions around us both fully accept and promote giving into it, attempting to convince us to join them. Unfortunately, the loss

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of common morality based in God's Word from the people surrounding us and the rapidly changing ways in which temptation presents itself have left the Church smaller and feeling more alone than ever in this battle. However, God has supplied us with the resources we need in these changing times. Last month we discussed that we can more easily know right from wrong if we recognize the relationship God has offered to those who have been added by joining the death which Jesus died and rising in newness of spirit; God is our Heavenly Father, and we must live that relationship. God is our ever-knowing guardian who sees us at all times, and as we would with earthly parental figures, we know without written decree if our actions in a moment would please Him or disappoint Him. God has provided additional benefits that are to aid us in temptation, strife, and all aspects of life we encounter, no matter how the battlefield around us changes: namely, the perception of eternity and the Spirit's intercession on our behalf.

We often cite Romans 8:18 thinking of it in terms of suffering persecution, specifically, persecution from outside sources regarding our beliefs. Although this is not inaccurate, these sufferings refer to much more than ancient persecutions that the early Church endured. In this section of his letter to the Romans, Paul describes a mindset that we should constantly have equipped.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of

the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Rom. 8:18-25)

We need to reframe what we think persecution is. Although Paul is likely referencing the religious persecutions the early Church endured at the time, persecution is best thought of as anything which threatens freedom. In this, sin is a persecution; it threatens the freedom we have from the flesh. Beyond religious persecutions, Paul is getting at a deeper thought process: how do we weigh any given moment against the infinite depth of eternity? That is, do we value “now” more than “forever?” Paul’s readers in Romans, Gentile and Jew alike, were very focused on the “now” and immediate gratification. Most Gentiles, especially in Rome’s culture, lived for decadence and pleasing themselves in whatever way they desired; this violated nothing within their view of morality (not unlike 2021...). For the most part, the Jews didn’t live in such obvious hedonism; the Mosaic law kept such excesses in check, and this was an advantage of the law. However, the Jews, especially Pharisees, put more emphasis on following the law to a “T” in the “here and now” to the extent that they were living to serve the law more than its creator. Now, when Paul references the glory (the same glory of which we are joint heirs with Christ through the adoption [8:17]) which is to come, he now has us thinking of eternity. So, do we value immediate gratification at the cost of eternal loss?

Appropriately weighing the desires of the moment against the longer-term considerations is called delayed gratification. Delayed gratification is best illustrated in a fairly famous psychological experiment often called the marshmallow experiment. Young children are sat down and an experimenter places a plate with a single marshmallow in front of the children. The

experimenter is about to leave the room and tells the children they have two choices: 1) you can have this one marshmallow whenever you want; or 2) if you wait and do not eat this before the experimenter returns to the room, then you can have two marshmallows. Simply, small pleasure now or larger pleasure later. The catch is the experimenter does not tell them when he or she will return. It's just the children and the single marshmallow with no idea how long to wait. Typically, the children will decide they want to wait so they can have two. However, while waiting, they lose their patience. They stare longingly at this single marshmallow. They poke at it, smell it, lick it, and maybe even nibble on it. After all, a nibble isn't technically eating the whole thing, right? Fairly frequently the children will explicitly state they are waiting, yet they eventually eat the marshmallow before the experimenter can return to reward them with a second marshmallow. This describes us all too well. We have opportunities to give in to the desires of the flesh, and these opportunities are often on a plate in front of us. We're aware of an even greater pleasure awaiting us, but we don't know when. "*For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*" (1 The. 5:2). Sometimes, we lose sight of the great reward in eternity (joint inheritance with Christ!), because the wait seems so long. We have said we no longer serve sin and the desires of the flesh; our new and only master is God and we commit ourselves to Him and in His service (Rom. 6:17-18). However, we find ourselves as the children locked alone with a single appetizing marshmallow (temptation), and while we have an immense reward waiting for us in eternity,

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we poke, nibble, and even give in to the temptation. If you have the means and desire, I recommend you look up videos of this to really understand how much the young children resemble ourselves in the moment of temptation. This is one reason why having the perception of eternity in our minds in moments of temptation is so important.

Beyond this delayed gratification, thinking of eternity puts our perception of suffering in perspective. Does an hour, a week, a month, or a year of suffering (however we define it) really sound like that much pain in the context of eternity? Nobody enjoys physical, mental, or emotional pain and hardship. However, we must understand it is 1) temporary, and 2) earthly. Financial hardships for a few months sounds like a long time; it's nothing compared to eternity. Physical pain for a year sounds like a long time; it's nothing compared to eternity. Keeping the eternal nature and joint inheritance of God's glory in our mind puts our worldly hardships in perspective. Paul alluded to it earlier in this same letter, but this is how we can develop patience as our tribulations (ever-changing) only continue as we grow older:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:1-5).

Our salvation, the freedom from sin in its ever-changing ways of presenting itself is aided by making choices with the overhanging hope of life after, when the adoption is finalized (v. 24).

Finally, our additional resource provided us is the spirit interceding on our behalf.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:26-28).

As we're patiently waiting in hope, we aren't left to simply suffer without reason. Groanings which cannot be uttered (v. 26) are those pains and sufferings with which we may be unaware or cannot quite "put our finger on;" we're upset, we're uneasy, we're depressed, but maybe we can't exactly know why. Additionally, we countlessly pray for things we aren't to have, and we groan that we are without them. It may not be that we are purposefully praying for something wrong, but we don't have the limitless foreknowledge of God to know the difference between what we want and what we need at this time. The spirit knows what we need and makes the intercession in praying for it although we cannot always see or understand it. In other words, we get what we need even when it is not what we want. What does this do to our mindset? It keeps us from feeling shorted or cheated in this earthly life. It frees us from doubt, when doubt in God and God's plan seems to be at an all-time high in the world around us. Trust in the Spirit's intercession gives us the understanding that despite the frustrations we might see in our life as well as the turmoil in the world around us in these changing times, God's plan is at work.

God's promise of adoption and joint inheritance with Christ, the perception of eternity, and the Spirit's intercession on our behalf combined is why Paul asks, what more could we want or need? "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom. 8:31). With this mindset provided by these resources from God, we are then fully

outfitted as a soldier of Christ (Eph. 6:10-20) against any temptation. We can be protected even as our country, region, community, neighbors, and even family fall farther from God and sin's battlefield changes more and more. With the changes we see in the people and institutions surrounding us, morality has become fluid such that "your truth" is more important than an objective right and wrong, namely God's truth. As politicians and policy replace religion in the world around us on this ever-changing battlefield, we must stay strong to God's truth. The world has changed. Whether it's temptation presenting itself to us with an ease of access never seen before or the feelings of loss and discouragement as the world around us falls farther from God, God has equipped us with what we need. We must keep together and strengthen the most important remaining Godly community we have, the Church. We must continue to share this message and live an example to those around us, especially in this time when surrounding society actively pulls in the other direction. Sin's battlefield has changed, but the battle is an old one. The winning strategy has never changed:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Jos. 24:15)

BEN

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What was the name of Joseph's youngest brother?
2. What was the name of the woman who hid the spies at Jericho?
3. Why did Solomon turn away from God when he was old?
4. Out of the ten lepers who Jesus healed, how many came back to say thank you?

5. Who did Jesus pray for that his faith failed not?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH...

And remember last month's questions?

1. Which creature tricked Eve into eating of the forbidden fruit? SERPENT (Gen. 3:1-6)
 2. Whose mother placed him in an ark of bulrushes? MOSES (Exo. 2:3-10)
 3. Who was David's father? JESSE (Ruth 4:22)
 4. Who else, other than the wise men, came to visit Jesus when he was a small child? SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:15-16)
 5. What animals did Jesus cause to run into the sea and drown? PIGS (Mat. 8:29-32)
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FROM THE SCRIPTURES: ABOUT ANXIETY

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. (Psa. 127:2)

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Mat. 6:31-33)

And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? (Luke 12:25-26)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (Php. 4:6)

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Pet. 5:7)