

THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND

- A. Introduction: There is no such thing as a problem free life in this world. But it is possible to have peace of mind in the midst of life's trouble—peace that helps you make it through the turmoil until it's over. This peace comes to us through the written Word of God, the Bible. Phil 4:6
1. The night before Jesus was crucified He celebrated a Passover meal with His twelve apostles. We now refer to this meal as the Last Supper.
 - a. We know from the gospel of John that at that particular Passover meal Jesus spent much time preparing His followers for the fact that He was soon going to leave them. John gives us a lengthy record of many of the things Jesus that said. John 12-16
 - b. Note Jesus' final statement to His men. He told them that He spoke His words to give them peace: John 16:33—I have told you these things so that in Me you may have perfect peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer— take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted—for I have overcome the world.—I have deprived it of power to harm, have conquered it [for you] (Amp).
 2. For a number of months I've encouraged you to begin to read the Bible regularly and systematically—especially the New Testament. Regular systematic reading means that you read each book from start to finish over and over until you become familiar with the New Testament.
 - a. There are many benefits that come from reading God's Word. One of them is peace, peace that helps you deal with the mental and emotional torments which come with challenging circumstances
 1. The Greek word that is translated peace in the New Testament literally means the opposite of war and arguing. When used figuratively, the word means peace of mind.
 2. Peace of mind is a state of tranquility and quiet. Peace of mind is freedom from disquieting (troubling) or anxious thoughts and emotions (*Webster's Dictionary*).
 - b. Peace comes to us through the Bible (God's Word) because it reveals additional information about our situation.
 1. The Bible reveals that God is with us and for us and that there is no problem too big for Him. Neither is any situation impossible for Him to handle. No circumstance takes Him by surprise, and there is no situation for which He does not already have a solution.
 2. The Bible assures us that everything we see is temporary and subject to change by God's power, either in this life or the life to come. It shows us that Almighty God is able to use life's troubles and cause them to serve His purposes for good, and He will get us through until He gets us out.
 3. Recently, we've been focusing on the fact that when we encounter trouble we immediately experience anxious, agitating thoughts and emotions. Jesus was and is aware of this.
 - a. Note that in His Last Supper teaching where Jesus warned His followers that in this world we will have trouble, He not only told them to be encouraged because He has overcome, He also instructed them to let not their hearts be troubled (agitated, distressed, disturbed). John 14:1; John 14:27
 1. In other words, to experience peace of mind we must learn how to deal with agitating thoughts and emotions and get to the point where God's Word settles every issue for us—despite what we see and how we feel, despite the tormenting thoughts that fly through our head.
 2. We must learn to keep our attention focused on what God says in His Word. We don't deny what we see and feel. We recognize that there is more to reality than what we see and feel in the moment—Almighty God with us and for us, working for good in our circumstances.
 - b. We must also recognize that there's an unseen enemy at work in the midst of difficult circumstances who seeks to undermine our confidence in God. In this lesson, we begin to address these issues.
- B. Let's back up and consider something else Jesus told His apostles a few years before the Cross. You may

recall that when Jesus came to earth, first century Jewish people knew from the Old Testament prophets that a Messiah was coming who will establish the visible kingdom of God on earth. Dan 2:44; Dan 7:14; etc.

1. However, The Old Testament prophets were not clearly shown by the Spirit of God that there would be two coming of the Messiah separated by what we now know is at least two thousand years.
 - a. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin so that all who put faith in Him can be transformed from sinners into sons and daughters of God. John 1:12-13; Eph1:4-5; etc.
 - b. Jesus will come again to cleanse the earth of all sin, corruption, and death and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. The Lord will then establish His visible, eternal kingdom on earth and live here with His family forever. Acts 3:21; Rev 21-22; etc.
2. Luke 17:20-21—During His earth ministry Jesus began to reveal to His apostles that the kingdom of God was indeed at hand (Matt 4:17), but that it would first come in an unseen form. The kingdom (or reign) of God would come through a new birth in the hearts of men, accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. This new birth would be an inward cleansing and indwelling by God in the hearts of all who put faith in Christ (many lessons for another day). John 3:3-5; John 1:12-13; etc.
 1. Jesus then explained to His disciples that the kingdom or reign of God in the hearts of men would spread through the proclamation of the Word of God. In a series of parables, Jesus compared the spread of God’s kingdom through the Word of God to a sower who sows seed.
 2. Jesus gave much information about this process and the nature of the kingdom. For now, note one point. Jesus said that the wicked one (the devil) comes to try steal the Word of God before it can have much effect on the hearer, and that he works in times of tribulation, persecution, and affliction. Matt 13:18-21; Mark 4:14-17
 3. The devil’s ultimate goal is to pressure you into giving up your faith in Christ. If he can’t do that, he’ll settle for making you as ineffective as possible, a Christian with little fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, etc.).
 - b. We must recognize that there is an enemy of God and His people at work in the world—the devil and his minions. They are created beings (angels) who rebelled against God in ages past (lessons for another day). We must understand how the devil (Satan) works and how to deal with him.
 1. The devil’s primary tactics are mental. He presents us with lies about God, about ourselves, and about our circumstances. Our defense against his lies is the truth—the Word of God.
 2. We must realize that we are particularly vulnerable to these mental attacks when we’re in the midst of trouble (persecution, affliction, and tribulation) because what we see and feel in the moment often seems to contradict God’s Word.
3. To experience peace in this difficult life you must win the battle for your mind. That’s one reason why the Bible has so much to say about your mind and where you focus your attention.
 - a. Rom 12:2—Christians (people who have already undergone a tremendous transformation through the new birth) are instructed to be further transformed by the renewing of their mind. A renewed mind is a mind that sees things the way they really are according to Almighty God.
 - b. Eph 4:18—When God’s kingdom comes into us at the new birth, our mind is not directly affected. The Bible reveals that our minds are darkened since, up until this point we had no access to light.
 1. All you can know is what you’ve been exposed to. We’ve all grown up under the influence of a system that is contrary to God and under the influence of the prince of the power of the air—the devil and his cohorts. II Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; Eph 6:12; etc.
 2. In addition to not having access to the unseen realities revealed in the Word of God, our minds are filled with misinformation and lies about God, ourselves, and the nature of reality. We have warped and ungodly thinking patterns (known as strongholds) in our minds. They have become our automatic response to life. (lessons for another day).
 - c. Regular Bible reading is critical to remedying our condition. Without the Bible, your mind will

never be renewed and you'll struggle with thoughts and behaviors that won't change until or unless your view of reality changes. Remember, it's not what you see. It's how you see what you see.

1. The Bible shows us the way things really are according to God. And, it exposes ungodly and harmful thinking patterns that built up in our mind over the years, so that they can be corrected.
2. Heb 4:12—For the Word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are (NLT).

- C. Nowhere does the Bible tell Christians to be afraid of or beware of the devil's power. The devil has no power over us. Jesus, through His resurrection, broke the power of the devil over all who put faith in Him.
1. Jesus didn't need to break the power of the devil for His sake. The devil had no power over Him. We needed the devil's hold on us broken, but were powerless to do so.
 - a. Jesus took our place at the Cross and defeated the devil for us through His resurrection victory. We will discuss this point in more detail in later lessons. For now consider these statements.
 1. Heb 2:14—Only by dying could he (Jesus) break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death (NLT).
 2. Col 2:15—(Through the Cross) God disarmed the (unseen) evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ (NLT),
 3. Eph 1:19-23—(Through resurrection) he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else in this world or the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ who fills everything everywhere with his presence (NLT).
 - b. Because you are part of the body of Christ, Jesus' authority over the devil is now yours. Although the devil has not yet been removed from all contact with humanity (he will be removed at the second coming of Jesus), the devil is under your feet (under your authority in Christ). Always face the devil as what he is—a defeated foe. We must enforce his defeat in our lives.
 2. The Bible tells us to be wise to the devil's mental strategies. Paul, who wrote many of the verses we've cited in our current series, wrote that we must stand against the wiles of the devil. Eph 6:11
 - a. The devil's tactics are mental. The Greek word that is translated wiles literally means to work by a method. It carries the idea of mental strategies and denotes craft and trickery.
 1. Paul wrote that Christians should not to be ignorant of the devil's devices (II Cor 2:11). The Greek word translated devices has the idea of mind games. The devil presents our mind with lies in an attempt to influence our behavior.
 2. The lies come to us in various ways—through the culture, through the words of others. But they also come in the form of thoughts in our mind.
 - b. All of us experience thoughts that we didn't consciously initiate. Have you ever been standing in line at the store and had this or a similar thought run through your mind: Steal this candy bar off the counter? That thought is followed by: You're a terrible person. You must not even be saved.
 1. Those are fiery darts from the enemy. His goal is to entice you to accept and act on those thoughts. He doesn't care if you steal a candy bar. But he is interested in destroying your confidence before you Heavenly Father.
 2. Note another important detail. The Greek word that is translated devil is *diabolos*. It is made up of two words, *dia* (through) and *balos* (I throw). Put together, those words mean to throw repeatedly until there is penetration. The devil is often relentless in his mental attacks.
 3. In Eph 6:12 Paul states that we wrestle with wicked spirits in the unseen realm. Wrestle literally means to vibrate or sway. The devil relentlessly seeks to sway you from faith and trust in the Lord, and from commitment and obedience to God. The devil can't make you do anything. He must persuade you to

act, and he does it through trickery (lies).

- a. This is why Paul tells believers to put on the armor of God—so that you can recognize and answer the mental strategies of the devil. God’s armor is His Word. Ps 91:4—His faithful promises are your armor and protection (NLT).
 1. Roman soldiers were a common sight in Paul’s day. A fully armed soldier was undefeatable. Paul exhorts Christians to put on the full armor of God. Eph 6:11; Eph 6:13-17
 2. Paul made reference to a complete set of armor (not so that we can pretend to put on a helmet and breastplate every morning) but to make a point. Each piece of armor represents a category of Bible information that enables us to identify, resist, and counter the lies of the enemy.
- b. Eph 6:13—Therefore put on God’s complete armor, that you may be able to resist and stand your ground on the evil day [of danger], and having done all [the crisis demands], to stand [firmly in your place] (Amp).

- D. During His time on earth Jesus showed us how we are to deal with the devil. We need to say something about the Lord Jesus before we note how He dealt with the devil. We could teach several lessons on this point because the Bible has so much to say, but for now consider one thing.
 1. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. Two thousand years ago, the Word (Jesus) was made flesh (took on a full human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary). John 1:1; John 1:14; Phil 2:6-7
 - a. At His incarnation Jesus became fully man without ceasing to be fully God. While He was on earth, He did not live as God. He lived as a man in dependence on God—one man, two natures, human and Divine.
 - b. This is how Jesus could be hungry, tired, and tempted to sin. This is why Jesus could die. God is not hungry or tired and He cannot be tempted to sin, nor can He die. Jesus, in His humanity experienced hunger, fatigue, temptation, and death. Matt 4:2; Mark 4:38; Heb 4:15; Heb 2:9
 2. We have a detailed example of how the devil tempted Jesus. There are more details in this incident than we can deal with now, but consider these points in connection with our discussion. Matt 4:1-11
 - a. Jesus spent forth days and nights fasting in the rugged Judean wilderness (desert). The devil came to Him at the end, when the man Jesus was hungry and no doubt fatigued.
 - b. Notice that the devil didn’t come with scare tactics in a display of horrifying power. He came with thoughts presented in the form of words. Jesus answered each of these mental temptations with the Word of God.
 1. Matt 4:3-4—If you are the Son of God (the Messiah), turn these rocks into bread. Forty days earlier God the Father had clearly spoken: This is My Son (Matt 3:17). Jesus answered the devil with: It is written, man shall not live by bread only, but by the Word of God (Deut 8:3).
 2. Matt 4:5-7—If you are the Son of God, throw yourself off this Temple pinnacle and watch the angels protect you—just as the Bible says He will (Ps 91:11-12). Jesus answered: It is written, you shall not tempt God (Deut 6:16).
 3. Matt 4:8-10—I (Satan) will give you the glory of all the kingdoms of this world if you will fall down and worship me. Jesus answered: It is written worship and serve God only (Deut 6:13).
 - c. Using the Word of God, Jesus resisted the lies of the devil, stood His ground, and the devil left Him. Luke 4:13—And when the devil had ended every [the complete cycle of] temptation, he left Him—temporarily, that is, stood off from Him until another more opportune and favorable time (Amp).
- E. Conclusion: In a world where troubles are unavoidable, Jesus has given us words that will bring us peace. But you will not experience this peace unless you read the Bible and learn to focus your mind on what God says. You will not experience peace unless you win the battle for your mind by learning to answer the mental strategies of the devil with the Word of God. Much more next week!