

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are in the midst of answering a question received from one of our listeners, who asked, "How do we fight against our sinful nature since God did not remove it completely and how can I overcome the sinful nature?" Last week we noted that God guarantees us the victory and we discussed our primary enemy, Satan. Dr. Spencer, how would like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I'd like to begin by looking again at Ephesians 6:12, which we quoted last week. In that verse, Paul told us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."<sup>1</sup> And I then said that to defeat an enemy we need to know his strengths, weaknesses and methods.

Marc Roby: And we noted that Satan's strength is that he is far more powerful than we are, but his weakness is that he is completely powerless to oppose God. Which is why we are told in 1 John 4:4 that the one who is in us, which is speaking of the Holy Spirit, is greater than the one who is in the world, which is speaking of Satan.

Dr. Spencer: And we noted that Satan's methods are mysterious in detail, but that he tempts us in various ways.

Marc Roby: And you noted that he is aided in that by our sinful nature.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he is aided tremendously. Satan, his demons, and the world under his control are our great external enemies, but we also have an internal enemy. In fact, I noted that Satan often doesn't need to work very hard at all to get us to sin. James tells us in James 1:14 that "each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

There is an old adage that it is difficult to cheat an honest man. And that adage is often true. For example, many scams play on people's desire to get rich without having to do anything to earn the money.

Marc Roby: When you say that, I immediately think of those supposed billionaire children of deposed African leaders who offer to let you keep a few million dollars if only you will give them your bank account number so that they can transfer a few hundred million into it for a month to get the money out of their country.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. We may laugh at such schemes when the emails come our way, but they are obviously successful often enough for these people to keep trying. The thought of getting a few million dollars for doing nothing is simply too much for some people to resist. But they

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would do well to remember another old adage: if something looks too good to be true, it probably *is* too good to be true.

**Marc Roby: Yes, I agree. But how does all this relate to answering our listener's question?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, if you are scrupulously honest, and seeking to live a holy life, you are far less likely to get caught in the traps that Satan might set for you. Those traps may not only result in your losing money, but they may also get you involved in situations that lead to greater sin. For example, young people going to parties where everyone is getting drunk or high on drugs. Such situations may lead to not only getting drunk, but to sexual sin as well. If you take a stand to simply avoid such situations in the first place, you can avoid a lot of Satan's traps.

**Marc Roby: Yes, I can see that. And I also think of business people letting themselves get in trouble by trying to cut a few corners or shade the truth a little in some situation in order to make more money or avoid some work.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that happens as well. But as we discussed two weeks ago in Session 219, a true Christian is constantly involved in an internal spiritual war. We have a new nature given to us by regeneration. And that new nature is opposed by our old sinful nature, which the Bible often refers to as the flesh. We need to ask God for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to win this war and put our sin to death as we noted in that session.

For example, we read in Galatians 5:17-18 that "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

**Marc Roby: We also talked in Session 219 about the fact that Christians are free to not sin. But sadly, we are also free *to* sin, and then suffer the consequences in this life. It can sometimes be depressing that this war goes on and on without end.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that can get a bit depressing at times. And Satan will attack us at such times. He will come and put wicked, unbiblical thoughts into our minds. He will cause us, for example, to think, "I can't be a Christian or I wouldn't still be struggling with sin. I would have complete and total victory over it." And, like all good lies, there is an element of truth to that. Christians can be victorious over sin and we should see increasing holiness in our lives. But no Christian is ever one-hundred percent victorious over sin in this life. Perfection only comes when we die.

**Marc Roby: As is often the case, we need a balanced understanding. We can't say that obedience is not important, but we also don't want to run off into the other ditch and say that we should expect perfect obedience either.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right. We need to avoid the ditches on both sides of the road. In his commentary on 1 John, Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes an encouraging point about this battle. He wrote that "If you are in a state of conflict with these opposing forces" – and he is speaking about the conflict between our sinful nature and our new nature – "you can be quite sure the

Holy Spirit is in you, because without the Holy Spirit there is no such conflict”<sup>2</sup>. And he says this in reference to 1 John 4:13, which says, “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ point is that this internal struggle is very good evidence that we have the Holy Spirit and are, in fact, born again, which, as we have explained last time, is a guarantee that we will achieve ultimate victory.

**Marc Roby: Yes, that is a very encouraging point indeed.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. But getting back to what Paul wrote, he goes on in Ephesians 6 to give us good counsel about how to fight this spiritual battle. After telling us in Verse 12 that our struggle is “against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”, he goes on in Verse 13 to say, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

**Marc Roby: There is a great promise in that verse. The implication is clear that if we do put on this armor, we will, in fact, be able to stand. And, hopefully, our listeners should now be curious to know more about this full armor of God.**

Dr. Spencer: And we will learn about it. Paul lists six things. But before we get into them individually, let me quote what the Rev. P.G. Mathew said about this armor. He wrote, “Notice that every element of this armor mentioned in this passage has something to do with the word of God. The word is central.”<sup>3</sup> As we go through the armor in detail, we will see that this statement is true, which reinforces the point we have made that the Word of God is the preeminent means of grace for a Christian.

Mathew also wrote that “We are commanded to ‘put on the whole armor of God.’ In the Greek this is in the aorist tense, meaning we put on the armor once and for all. We are supposed to sleep with it, eat with it, work with it, come with it, and go with it. We must have it on at all times. What is the purpose of putting on this armor God gives us? That we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby: That makes it clear how important this armor is – it is to be our way of life.**

Dr. Spencer: And now let’s move on to look at that armor in detail. In Ephesians 6:14 Paul starts by saying, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist”.

**Marc Roby: Which immediately reminds me that Jesus Christ said, in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

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<sup>2</sup> M. Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ; Volume Four, The Love of God*, Studies in 1 John, Crossway Books, 1994, pp 98-99

<sup>3</sup> From P.G. Mathew, *Power for Living – Part 3*, delivered Sunday, September 28, 2003 at Grace Valley Christian Center, available at <https://gracevalley.org/sermon/power-for-living-part-3/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Dr. Spencer: And in Ephesians 1:13 Paul wrote that we, as Christians, “were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit”. So the Bible is the word of truth.

**Marc Roby: And in Psalm 31:5 David declared to God, “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.”**

Dr. Spencer: And, finally, in John 16:13 Jesus told his disciples that “when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” Therefore, we see that all three persons of the Trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are truth and, in addition, the Word of God contained in the Bible is truth. Mathew’s statement that the Word is central is certainly proven true for this first element of the armor.

**Marc Roby: Yes, it is. But what does it mean practically in the day-to-day life of a Christian for him to put on the belt of truth?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, let me quote from Mathew again. He quotes from Psalm 51:6, in which David tells us that God desires truth in the inner parts, and he then writes, “The one who denies God’s objective truth given in the Holy Scriptures is ill-prepared to fight the devil and his evil forces. A powerful Christian is a belted Christian. He has confidence in God’s objective revelation from beginning to end. He believes that God created the heavens and the earth. He believes that God is triune. He believes that Jesus Christ is God/man, and that he rose from the dead. He believes in miracles, in heaven and hell. He believes everything that is in the Book, so he is confident. Can you imagine a wishy-washy person trying to fight the devil? A true Christian has confidence in God’s objective revelation, and he lives in conformity to that revelation.”

**Marc Roby: Mathew’s rhetorical question is a great one, I absolutely cannot imagine a wishy-washy, nominal Christian fighting Satan and being successful.**

Dr. Spencer: Nor can I. And Mathew is not implying, of course, that Christians have absolutely no doubts about anything, or that we have a perfect understanding of all of the Word of God. But we must be solid on the fundamentals of our faith or we are like a soldier going into battle unprepared; I’m tempted to say without a belt to hold his pants up.

**Marc Roby: Let’s not go there. But the point is a good one. How can you derive any strength to resist temptation if you don’t believe in the historical truth of Jesus’ atonement having paid for your sins? Or of the reality of heaven and hell?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, you can’t have any strength to resist temptation at all. In fact, if you don’t believe in heaven and hell and a real, physical resurrection and eternal life, then I would ask, “Why would you resist temptation to do something that may give you pleasure?” Now, you can imagine some circumstances where a person would resist temptation of course. For example, a man who is happily married may very well resist the temptation to commit adultery because he knows it will damage his marriage. But, in general, the ability to resist temptation is severely weakened if we don’t have a biblical understanding.

**Marc Roby: We need to know that there is a day of judgment coming.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes. We need to know there is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly just God who is going to judge us and that there is an eternal punishment or reward that depends on that judgment. If this life is all there is, then we should, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:32 “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

**Marc Roby: You only go around once. Grab all the gusto you can.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s the idea. If this life is all there is, an intelligent person will still moderate his most selfish impulses to some extent because he realizes that if everyone does that life will be much more pleasant. But that still leaves an awful lot of room for sin.

**Marc Roby: And there are always going to be some people who will not moderate their behavior, which is why we need police and prisons.**

Dr. Spencer: Very true. And so, the first thing to say about truth as a way of helping us win the spiritual war is that we must stand on the truth of God’s Word. It alone is infallible. It is the only place where we have eternal realities revealed to us with certainty.

But there is more that can be said about the importance of truth. It isn’t just a matter of our personal beliefs, we should also seek to build a society that honors truth.

**Marc Roby: Well, that is certainly a major problem in our world today.**

Dr. Spencer: It certainly is. Truth is under attack. But this isn’t a new problem. The prophet Jeremiah spoke to the people in Jerusalem around 600 BC, prior to the city being destroyed by the Babylonians and the people being carried off into captivity. In Jeremiah 7:28 we read that God told him to say to the people, “This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips.”

**Marc Roby: And right after that we read this terrifying statement God makes to the prophet in Jeremiah 7:29, God tells him, “Cut off your hair and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the LORD has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath.”**

Dr. Spencer: That is terrifying. Cutting off your hair was a sign of mourning. As Christians we must be zealous for truth. First and foremost, we must be zealous for the truth of God’s Word, but also for truth in every sense of the term. We must oppose lies in every sphere of activity. Lies are destructive. In John 8:44 we read that Jesus said when Satan “lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

**Marc Roby: And in John 10:10 we read that Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

Dr. Spencer: And the thief, of course, is Satan. There can be no greater contrast than the one between God and Satan. God is truth, Satan is the father of lies. That alone should be sufficient reason for Christians to be zealous about the truth. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul gave instruction to Timothy and said, “if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

**Marc Roby: That's an interesting description of the church; the pillar and foundation of the truth.**

Dr. Spencer: Because the most important truth in the world is that God created all things and will judge all things. God's original creation was completely good. But he allowed rebellion and sin to enter, which brought death, decay, sickness and all troubles. The only cure for the problems of the world is Jesus Christ. He is the only Savior, the only Lord. Sinners must be called to repent, believe and walk in obedience. Any other message about the ultimate purpose of life or way of salvation is a lie.

**Marc Roby: And Jeremiah was dealing with many of the same kinds of lies we deal with today.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he was. In laying his charges against the people, we read in Jeremiah 6:13-15 that the Lord said, "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them".

**Marc Roby: That sounds like many modern preachers.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. They tell everyone that God is love and will never judge anyone. If you are a practicing homosexual, or you are having sex outside of marriage, or if you get drunk every Friday night, it's all OK. Don't worry about it. God wants you to be happy. And our culture has so abandoned the truth that it will highly criticize me for saying that God is not pleased with these things and that he will, in fact, punish them. Our culture will say, "How dare you say this other Christian is wrong?" When, of course, we have the Bible as a written guide to tell us how we should live. Calling yourself a Christian does not make it true.

As Christians, we must stand for truth even if everyone opposes us. Jesus told us, in John 4:24, that "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

**Marc Roby: And truth is decided by God.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. What I like or don't like is completely irrelevant. But rejecting truth is at its root a rejection of God, since God is truth. It is what Adam and Eve did when they believed the devil's lie. God had said, in Genesis 2:17, "You will surely die." But Satan said, in Genesis 3:4, "You will not surely die."

In his scathing condemnation of sinful humanity in Romans, the apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 1:25, that "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen."

**Marc Roby: Alright. We have the first piece of armor that Christians need, the belt of truth. And I look forward to hearing more, but it will have to wait until our next session. For now I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We'd love to hear from you.**