

## **9. Winning the Great Struggle Strengthens the Church**

The Christian life is the divine struggle between good and evil. Paul wrote in Eph 6:10-12:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For 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.

One can easily imagine how if each Christian would put on the full armor of God, it would strengthen the church.

### ***The Devil's Schemes Assail the Church***

The devil aims at destroying us spiritually through an-all out attack on our human weakness. He has huge resources at his disposal to accomplish this attack – rulers, authorities, powers of the dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. They attack the weaknesses of each member of the Lord's church. John told us about these weaknesses in 1 John 2:15-17:

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

### ***Lust and Sin Destroy Churches and Church Members***

The devil's main scheme is to destroy the church members with lust and sin. Our cravings as sinful men, our lust of the eyes, and our boasting lead us to sin. James tells us exactly what the church member is up against in James 1:12-15:

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

### ***Losing the Struggle Keeps Us from Inheriting the Eternal Kingdom of God***

Paul describes this struggle against our own lusts in detail in Gal 5:16-21 as a war between the spirit and the flesh:

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If we fail in this great struggle, we will not inherit the kingdom of God. The devil will have destroyed us, and he will have destroyed that part of the church represented by us.

### ***Winning the Struggle Strengthens the Church and Saves Our Souls***

Winning the struggle strengthens the church and saves our souls. In Gal 5:22-26, Paul concluded his

discussion of the Christians' struggles:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other.

God has equipped us fully to win this struggle, leaving both the Christians and the Church of the Lord strong. Paul describes this equipment as the full armor of God in Eph 6:13-17:

13 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. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

### ***This Struggle Is the Good Fight of Faith***

Paul taught by word and example that Christians are to fight the fight of faith in this struggle against evil. Paul taught Timothy to fight this good fight in 1 Tim 1:18-19:

18 Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, 19 holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

The result of winning this struggle is that Christians and the church, by inference, take hold of eternal life. In 1 Tim 6:11-12, Paul taught:

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Finally, Paul concluded he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. In 2 Tim 4:7-8, he extended the reward—the crown of life—to all Christians as those who long for his appearance:

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

### ***Conclusion***

Christians and the church have victory in Jesus! 1 Cor 15:54-57

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

John spoke of this same victory 1 John 5:4-5, "4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Christians and the church, by extension, need always to remember that if they are the called, the chosen, and the faithful follower of the Lamb, Jesus, they will share in the Lord's victory. Rev 17:14 reads, "14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."