

THOSE WHO OVERCOME THE TEMPTER

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II. THE TEMPTER AND THOSE WHO OVERCOME THE TEMPTER

A. The Overcomers

Other than our Lord Jesus Christ, no one is an overcomer. "The Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). "It [the seed of the woman] shall bruise thy [the serpent's, Satan's] head" (Gen. 3:15). Christ is the Victor. He is the One who has destroyed the works of the devil and the One who has bruised the serpent's head. Christ has overcome. If we acknowledge this fact continually and join ourselves to Christ, we will overcome continually. Satan is the most afraid of our continually speaking this word of our testimony (Rev. 12:11), acknowledging Christ as the Overcomer. Such a word of testimony will drive Satan away. Christ has overcome. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! (See Mark 1:24, 27; 3:11.)

B. The Place of Overcoming

Other than Golgotha, is there another place where Satan is overcome? The cross at Golgotha is the place where Satan and his power is defeated. The victory at Golgotha is still effective today. "Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it [the cross]" (Col. 2:15). "Through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Man may consider the Lord Jesus' crucifixion as His failure, yet that was the very place of His victory. In the world, there is no way to determine the victor before the two armies have engaged one another and fought the battle. The Lord was crucified on the cross, and He resurrected from the dead. He went into death, fought with death, overcame the power of death, and then emerged victorious over everything. It would be impossible to say that the Lord has overcome Satan if He had not died and resurrected. This is why the Lord had to die—to fight with Satan, he who has the might of death, and overcome him. The Lord's resurrection is the proof of His victory. When Christ was advancing toward Golgotha, He said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). Satan was defeated at Golgotha. All those who want to fight against Satan elsewhere are destined to fail. Other than at Golgotha, Satan is always victorious. He was defeated only at Golgotha, and he was defeated at Golgotha forever. Hence, all those who are joined to the Lamb of Golgotha, who stand on the basis of His victory at Golgotha, not attempting to gain another new victory but expressing the one unique victory in the present battle, will overcome. Defeat comes when one trusts in the self, but victory comes when one stands on the ground of Golgotha. Golgotha is the place of victory! Golgotha is our home! What can cause us to fear?

C. The Warfare Announced by the Messengers

We are the Lord's messengers declaring the victory at Golgotha and Christ as the Victor. "To whom I send you,...to turn them...from the authority of Satan to God" (Acts 26:17-18). The victory at Golgotha is still effective today; Jesus the Savior is still the Victor. Satan is still the defeated one; he is powerless toward us. Hence, we all must turn away from the authority of Satan to God.

D. The Release of the Captives

"Who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). Christ has overcome, and He is still overcoming. We are now in His kingdom, having been transferred out of the authority of darkness. If we firmly remember this fact and fully believe in it, the authority of darkness will not be able to come to us. The best way to maintain ourselves in this position is to periodically declare our position by faith and by our will.

E. The Victory of the Christians

Christ is the Overcomer. When we are in Christ and are joined to Him, we will also be the overcomers. We can overcome every day because the Lord has said, "Behold, I have given you the authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy...The spirits are subject to you" (Luke 10:19-20). "In My name they will cast out demons" (Mark 16:17; cf. Acts 16:18; 19:15). Apart from the Lord, we can do nothing. We should abide in the Lord all the time. If we do everything in the Lord's name, Satan will be defeated continually.

III. THE DECEPTIONS OF THE TEMPTER

Although Satan has numerous deceptions, "we are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11). If so, what do his deceptions accomplish? Unfortunately, though some of us know his deceptions, our intention is not to guard against him! We can know all things in the Lord through the Holy Spirit; hence, none of Satan's deceptions can escape our eyes. Furthermore, when we trust in the Lord's strength, Satan's deceptions will become useless.

A. His Plot against the Unsaved Ones

Some unsaved ones love to listen to the Word, but Satan will rob them by stealing away the word. "Those beside the way are those who heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they would not believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). The devil is afraid of the Word, but he is not afraid of talk concerning the Word. When we preach, we must not speak rashly and lose our spiritual power, for the devil will snatch away the word once he sees it. Those who are unsaved, those who are about to believe and be saved, and those who are not interested in the Word at all, have their minds deceived by the devil already. "In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them" (2 Cor. 4:4). We should pray that the eyes of the unsaved ones would be opened to receive the Lord's word and that this word would grow and bear fruit.

B. His Deceptions against the Saved Ones

1. Keeping Them from Being Absolute in Their Consecration to God (Acts 5:3)

God is a jealous God. He demands man's total consecration, and He charges man to love Him with all his heart, all his mind, all his strength, and all his soul. He expects man to be selfless and to keep nothing back for himself. However, Satan is the most afraid of man's absolute consecration. For man to do this causes Satan to lose his field of work. "Why has Satan filled your heart...to put aside for yourself some of the proceeds of the land?" (Acts 5:3). This couple was filled in their hearts with Satan; they kept something for themselves, yet they said that they were fully consecrated. Most believers today consider it wrong not to consecrate at all, yet they consider that the price of consecration is too high. As a result, they often deceive themselves and others by keeping back a portion for their own use. The rest they consecrate to God in the hope that they will gain for themselves the appearance of total consecration. Little do they know that Satan has filled their hearts already! Those who read this should ask themselves whether or not they have fully consecrated themselves.

2. Holding Them Back from Taking Off Their Filthy Garments (Zechariah 3:1-3)

When the prodigal son came home, the father gave him the best robe. The prodigal son could not wear the clothes of a pauper in his father's house. The robe denotes righteousness. The devil is afraid that man will take off his old righteousness. This is why he always tries to set up another righteousness apart from the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3). We should put on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus and cast off the righteousness of self-renouncing service which most moralists hold today. "Then He showed me Joshua...and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him....Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments" (Zech. 3:1, 3). Satan dislikes for us to take off any "former" things. Believers are saved through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, yet they are not willing to remove their "former" righteousness. The clothes may be naturally filthy, yet they are still clothes. Although the righteousness one holds is filthy, it is still a kind of righteousness. Satan causes the believers to have a righteousness which is based upon their own strength, that is, to develop their natural righteousness, hoping that by so doing they will obtain God's favor and earn man's praise. Little do they know that old garments are extremely filthy before God; our natural righteousness is unacceptable to God. Satan encourages us to execute the demands of the spirit by the soul. We should beware of this.

3. Working in Fleshly Jealousy and Rivalry (James 3:14-15)

Satan is not willing to see Christians become one. When two disciples come together, he will try to divide them. When three disciples come together, he will try to isolate them from one another. The more linkages there are, the more he will try to break them into pieces. He will try to stir up jealousy and rivalry among the believers, causing them to become reluctant to work together. This is true not only concerning physical things; even in spiritual work, he causes the believers to become jealous of and compete against each other: "You are more

spiritual than I am." "Your preaching is more welcomed by others than mine is." "Your doctrinal views are different from mine." From this, jealousy and rivalry arise. This rivalry is bitter and comes from the heart of man. Outwardly, it is not easy to detect, yet how very dangerous it is!

4. Keeping Them from the Cross by Means of Other Men (Matthew 16:22-23)

"And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord!...But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:22-23). The devil found his defeat on the cross; therefore, he is the most afraid of a man going to the cross and securing the victory of Golgotha. Here, Satan was so bold as to tempt the Lord Jesus Himself. He tried to make Him set His mind on the things of men rather than on the things of God (v. 23). The devil is good at using natural affection to turn man away from the way of the cross. He will cause man to think that this way is too hard, too difficult, and that for one to take it would be too harsh on the self. If we set our mind on the things of men, we will not be able to set it on the things of God. Hence, whether through self-pity or a natural concern for others, we will inevitably cause God's will to suffer loss. Once a man becomes prosperous, it becomes easy for Satan to put his own things inside him; self-love, self-esteem, and self-pity are all contrary to the way of the cross. To avoid something, to pity the self, to fear, and to compromise, are to Golgotha as north is to south. Satan's way is to encourage man to hold on to the self and to cling to natural affections. Satan is afraid that man will go to the cross to be crucified and then resurrected from the dead (v. 21). For this reason, he tries his best to prevent man from going to the cross, for apart from the cross, there is no other way ordained by the Lord (1 Thes. 3:3). Which way are you taking today? It is a pity that many Christians try to sidestep the cross whenever they see it and are unwilling to be crucified! Although they are spared from suffering, the ease and comfort which they gain cannot be compared with the will of God which they miss! If they actually die, they will actually resurrect, and Satan will have no ground to stand. This is what Satan hates the most. Since Satan is afraid of our dying on the cross and resurrecting from the dead, we should all the more die to our self through trusting in the Lord and then resurrect from the dead.

5. Threatening Them as a Roaring Lion (1 Peter 5:8)

The devil not only deceives men in secret, but seeks to devour those who are not sober and watchful. Before Martin Luther died, Satan related his sins to him in detail, threatening him, that he might doubt his salvation. However, in the end Luther overcame Satan by the grace of the Lord. From this we see that Satan always threatens and seeks to devour men when they seem to be at their weakest hour. This is one among the many great works of Satan. Satan's plan is to intimidate man by taking the offensive. As a lion roars to intimidate the beasts and then seeks to devour them, in the same way Satan threatens the believers, causing them to fail through fear. Many times he has nothing besides his threatening! Those who see that all that he has are mere threats will no longer fear his threatenings. However, those who take in his threats will experience much of what he threatens them with. Do we not constantly have the experience of his empty threats? Then why should we be afraid of him?

6. Making Them Proud (1 Timothy 3:6)

"Lest being blinded with pride he fall into the judgment suffered by the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). Immediately after believing, many Christians advance quite well spiritually and have some results in their work. At this point Satan would take the opportunity to come in and cause such ones to become proud and fall. We often see that great war heroes and even great revivalists can fall through sin because of the common wiles of Satan. He often induces men to take God's grace for themselves. Then when grace works in their hearts, he causes them to have a high esteem of themselves, to think that they are different from other people, and even that they are something special! Satan is most pleased to see men proud of themselves because this is his nature.

7. Causing Them to Do Things beyond God's Will (2 Samuel 24:1)

"It incited David against them to say, `Go, number Israel and Judah'" (2 Sam 24:1, NASB). "It" here should refer to Satan. God did not order David to number the people. But because Satan likes to see men suffering God's wrath as he also suffers, he incited David to do something beyond God's will. He will either hold men back from advancing or push them to do too much. Christians today often carelessly think that all promptings are from the Holy Spirit. Little do they know that Satan can prompt men also. The numbering of Israel and Judah did not

seem to be so great a sin, but whenever men act apart from God's will, Satan's plot is carried out. Believers are often lacking in "spiritual discernment"; when they are stirred up to do something which they do not perceive as evil, they deem that it is of the spirit. However, we should not judge the source of such promptings by considering whether the thing is good or evil; we must judge these promptings by considering whether or not it is God's will. There are many good things which are outside of God's will!

8. Causing Them to Doubt God's Word (Genesis 3:1)

God clearly charged man in Genesis 2:17 not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Nevertheless, the devil said, "Hath God said?" (Gen. 3:1). Every Scripture is God's Word and can be used to attack Satan. Satan is afraid of this; therefore, he causes man to doubt the Bible as the Word of God. The alarming thing is that most of the doubters of the Bible are believers rather than outsiders! The devil causes men first to doubt God's word, then to believe in his own word, and finally to fall into sin (Gen. 3). His working in this way has never ceased since the time of the garden of Eden.

9. Oppressing Them and Making Them Sick (Acts 10:38)

The devil is full of deceptions. If he cannot cause men to rebel in their spirit, he will work on their bodies, oppressing them with sickness. Because of this, men are not able to enjoy the blessing of the resurrection life and lose both their peace in the body and their steadfastness and watchfulness in the spirit, thus fulfilling Satan's wish. We often see active Christian workers in this world becoming sick through a little carelessness. The devil likes to see Christians become sick, so that they will stop working for the Lord.

C. His Deceptions against Those in God's Hand

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job,...a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8).

1. Throwing His Darts (Ephesians 6:16)

Toward the strong Christians, those who are the Lord's best soldiers, Satan cannot easily apply his temptations in the dark or his threats in the open. These believers are quite strong and tenacious in fighting against Satan. As a result, Satan unleashes his utterly evil murderous nature (John 8:44) and attacks with flaming darts, hoping that by so doing he will put the believers to death and cripple them so much that they will not be able to rise again. However, we have the way to annihilate him; it is by God's faithfulness. "Having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). Faith is a shield for quenching, not a pair of pliers for removing the flaming darts after they have already struck the body. We should place faith between us and the devil in the same way that we would place a shield between ourselves and the enemy in a battle. If the enemy wants to hurt the holder of the shield, he first must pass through the shield. If the shield is strong, the weapons of the enemy will not be able to come close to the body. Hence, in fighting with Satan we have to take faith in God as our shield. When Satan's flaming darts come close to this shield, they will be quenched by our faith and will not hurt us. Those who are holding this shield will detect the devil's assault from every direction. If they trust in God as their protection and do not slacken one bit, the devil will not be able to carry out his scheme.

2. Setting Up His Snare (1 Timothy 3:7)

The believers should advance by running quickly (Phil. 3:14); they should not linger on the wayside. The devil hates the speed of the believers' advance; hence, he secretly sets up snares to trap them. It is very easy for a runner to fall when he comes upon something. Such a fall usually inflicts severe injuries. Satan's crafty snares are everywhere. Their intention is to cause the believers to plummet in their spiritual condition and to remain low forever. The way of victory is seen in Psalm 25:15: "My eyes are continually turned to Jehovah,/For He will bring my feet out of the net." When one first comes across this verse, it seems odd. If the ground is covered with nets, while one is running he should look for the nets in order to avoid them. But here the eyes are turned to Jehovah in the heavens. If, while there are nets on the ground, the face is turned to the heavens and the feet are running forward, will not such a person fall and die? We know that the devil's nets do not have to be physical. It is not easy for us to find out where they are. Then, even if we know where they are, when we set our

eyes on the nets and try to avoid them, we can no longer run a straight course. This is why we have to look to God. God knows where the nets are. He will hold our feet and keep us from falling into the nets, caring for us step by step until we reach the goal.

3. Exercising His Stratagems (Ephesians 6:11)

If a man chooses Christ and remains in Him all the time, the devil will not be able to inflict his harm. But as soon as he has opportunity, he will first draw men to leave their position in Christ and then lead them away from Christ. Here we can apply Ephesians 6:13: "Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day."

4. Accusing the Believers (Revelation 12:10)

Satan pays much attention to our every move. He is always looking for an opportunity to accuse us and to draw us into his punishment. However, we should overcome him "because of the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11). "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7). The blood of Jesus is still cleansing us today. The Lord's blood is our ransom; even if Satan accuses us, what effect can it have? Hence, if believers have sinned accidentally and have already asked that the Lord's blood cleanse them afresh, they should no longer condemn themselves for this sin. Otherwise, they will inevitably be taken advantage of by Satan.

5. Corrupting Their Faith (2 Corinthians 11:3)

We should be pure and chaste toward Christ, as a virgin is toward her fiancé. The devil tries to defile men, causing them to become unfaithful to Christ and to fall into sin. But we can overcome him with 1 John 2:14: "The word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one." God's word is the sword of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:17). If we counter Satan's deceptions with the sword of the Holy Spirit, he will be wounded. When the Lord Jesus was tempted, He overcame Satan with the words of the Scriptures. For this reason, we should always keep the word of God richly in our hearts, so that we can overcome the evil one. Then whenever a temptation or attack comes, we can immediately remember the appropriate Scriptures, and if we exercise full faith to believe that the Scriptures must be fulfilled, the enemy will be defeated. This is the meaning of overcoming the enemy by the word of God.

6. Transfiguring Himself into an Angel of Light (2 Corinthians 11:14)

If Satan were to unveil his evil form before the watchful believers, they would know for sure that this was Satan and would not follow him. For this reason, to deceive the believers, Satan has to transfigure himself into an angel of light so that they will unknowingly fall into a way of deception. He feigns God's voice and the Holy Spirit's leading, causing the believers who are zealous for the Lord's will to think that these are the Lord's leading and to hasten to obey. He also feigns many truths, making them to appear true and leading men to accept them. This point seems to be the hardest for one to prevail against, but the Scripture says, "Prove the spirits...You are of God, little children; and you have overcome them because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:1, 4). If we trust in the Holy Spirit within us, we can overcome the false spirits. If we cannot decide whether or not a leading is from God, we should first take a neutral attitude and pray, "O God, whatever is of You I will keep. Whatever is of Satan I will reject. Please reveal to me the source of this leading." If we will do this, surely the Lord will show us clearly. If we do this all the time, we will have a strong and healthy spiritual life.

7. Trying His Best to Persecute (Revelation 2:10)

The devil's deceptions are exhaustless. He uses all kinds of ways to hinder the believers from advancing. However, when he finds that he can no longer prevent the saints from advancing spiritually, he will put them into prison, persecute them, and stop their work, hoping to make them fall. All those who love and pity themselves are no match for Satan; the minute he coerces them with a life-threatening persecution, they will stop resisting him! But the Lord's faithful ones have long put their own life aside. Therefore, although there may be chains and tribulations, although they may be brought to the verge of death and even to death itself, "they

[love] not their soul-life even unto death" (Rev. 12:11). In the end, they overcome Satan! "This is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). How then can chains shake our heart!

8. Preventing the Saints' Prayers from Being Answered (Daniel 10:12-13)

"Daniel,...at the beginning of your supplications the command went forth" (Dan. 9:22-23). Before Daniel had finished his prayer, the answer had already been sent. "For from the first day that you set your heart to understand this matter,...your words were heard...But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days" (10:12-13). From this we can see how Satan prevents the saints' prayers from being answered. Daniel prayed and fasted for twenty-one days before he was answered. Was not that too burdensome for him? Today, Satan is doing the same thing in order to prevent the believers' prayers from being answered and to cause them to be disappointed. We can overcome him with the words in Luke 18:1: "They ought always to pray and not lose heart." If we insist on what we have asked until the end, we will overcome. Some think that if we have faith in our prayer, one prayer is enough. Of course, this is right, but a persistent prayer requires great faith also. We should know that while we pray the answer is already coming from God's throne. At such times, a great spiritual battle is aroused, and we should all the more not lose heart in the matter of prayer. Rather, we should ask God to destroy the works of the devil. If we do this, our prayer will hit the mark. If we persist in our prayer, refusing to give up until we are answered, even if the enemy tries to stop us, the messengers in heaven will fight for us.