

Sanctification
Stand Strong for Holiness
Execution

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Introduction

If you ever listen to interviews with athletes after a victory, you have undoubtedly heard the announcer ask the question, "What was the key to this victory today?" In numerous instances the reply is something like this: "We just went out and executed. We had a good game plan, and we implemented it well. We did what we set out to do." Tonight we are going to talk about this kind of execution when the "game" is on in the life of followers of Christ, and the battle with temptation is happening. We have spent three sessions talking about preparing for the evil day. In this session we are going to articulate what we need to do when the evil day actually comes.

Ephesians 6:13 --- Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand in the evil day.

Although THE evil day may reference a particularly intense assault, every temptation is an evil day. Such "days" or moments occur regularly on the life of every Christian. Each one is a time for executing the aspects of battle. What are we to do in that moment? How should we fight the battle?

Several scriptures are key.

James 1:12-15

1 Corinthians 10:13

Ephesians 6:12-20

From these texts, we need to discuss several items: the anatomy of temptation and the victory over temptation.

1. Anatomy of Temptation

- Temptation constitutes a trial. The moment of temptation is a moment of testing. God does not tempt anyone, but God does test. And God allows temptation in order to test us. Temptation puts us to the test. Our faith, our commitment, our heart's resolve to obey God, even our love for God is being assessed, checked, investigated, and examined. Is it real? True? Genuine?

You might say that living now, after coming to faith and looking ahead to glory, with

its cluster of daily temptations is a time of testing. It is a trial. Our goal is to “stand the test.” Standing the test evidences that we love God. So we should approach every temptation as a part of this trial, determined to stand, determined to evidence that we really do love the Lord.

- Temptations themselves do not come from God. He allows them but he is never the tempter. He does not desire for you and me to disobey him. The things that tempt us NEVER tempt him. So temptation does not come from God but each one is under the control of God. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, God is faithful in the midst of temptation. He does not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. Temptations then are NEVER greater than we can withstand.

- Although the devil does tempt us, the fundamental culprit in our temptation is our own lust. Everyone is tempted when they “lured and enticed by his own desire. These desires are of many different kinds, but they are all sinful. Not all desire is sinful, but our hearts are full of evil desires and evil motives that turn even permissible desires into sinful longings. We are like a fish that can be enticed into danger, but the lure that gets us is not out there somewhere. It is right here inside.

Let’s consider what this says about our experience of temptation to, say, anger. When we are tempted to anger, it does not come from an external voice suggesting that we get angry; does it? No, anger is already happening. The offense has occurred. The hammer has smashed our thumb. We feel rage within. Internally we experience an explosion which longs to burst out in loud ranting or vengeance. Similarly, fear does not come from an outward threat. It comes from within in response to the outward things that appears threatening.

Galatians 5:17 says 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 one another, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

- Sin happens when sinful desire is satisfied. James puts it this way: “when [desire] has conceived, it gives birth to sin.” Evil desires are part of the flesh that remains even though we have been born from above. When we give in to those evil desires, we let them hold sway over us. We bring our desires to meet up with the thing that they desire. Desires connect with gratification. That is conception. And the result is sin. Evil desires brought together with their fulfillment is sin. Sin is outward in act but also

inward in thought, imagination, motive, and attitude. And the end result is death.

Death is the destruction of life. It is the destruction of relationship. It is separation from life and separation from God. God warned Adam that if he ate the prohibited fruit, he would die in that very day. And he did. He was destroyed internally and externally. And his relationship with God was destroyed. This is the outcome of sin. It is death; it is destruction. Sin brings harm. It brings the worst of all harms.

2. Victory Over Temptation

- The language of victory is endurance. For James victory is seen as remaining steadfast, as having stood the test, keeping evil desire from conceiving by resisting the lure of desire. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, victory is taking the way of escape and enduring the temptation. In Ephesians 6, victory is described in terms of standing firm. Together these verses paint a picture of ongoing resistance against the ongoing force of attack. There is a little tree stump in my front yard. The tree itself died and I chopped it down. The 12 inch stump is still there. I tried to pull it out of the ground last summer, but it would not budge. It withstood every attempt I made to move it. That is an image of victory over temptation—an immovable stump. It resists the pull. It withstands the test. It remains steadfast. It endures.

- The steps for victory are set out by this cluster of verses (Ephesians 6:12-20; James 1:12-15; and 1 Corinthians 10:13). We can summarize them with a helpful acrostic. Ephesians 6:13 asserts that to be victorious in the evil day is to STAND FIRM.

S=Supplicate (prayer)

T=Trust (faith)

A=Alter course

N=Negate the Lies

D=Draw the Sword

FIRM=Endure to the end

SUPPLICATE. To supplicate means to pray. Seek the help of the Lord. The very first thing to do when you are under the gun is pray. What should you pray? "Deliver me from evil." Matthew 6:13. "Show me the way of escape." 1 Corinthians 10:13. "Help!" because you cannot do this in your own power. He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we can ask or think!

TRUST. Resisting temptation is largely a matter of faith. We must believe God. We must believe what he has said. If he has said that certain things are sinful, then they ARE bad for us. We must trust what he has said. We must trust what he has said about our ability in the Spirit to submit ourselves and our members to him for righteousness. Tell God that you trust him. Submit to his commands out of trust in his goodness and greatness and holiness.

ALTER COURSE. Change direction and do it quickly. Here is the way of escape. This is what your armor-of-God sandals are for. The gospel of peace gives readiness for your feet. Knowing the peace you have with God through the gospel, make way with your feet from temptation. Run! Flee! In 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul charges Timothy: "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things [the things after which some had wandered and left the faith]. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love steadfastness, gentleness." Remember Joseph who said "How can I do this thing and sin against God?" and ran for his life from Potiphar's wife. Run. Flee with these words, "How could I do this thing and sin against God?" Alter means change so here is a change of direction. We can defeat temptation by pursuing sin's opposite. If the temptation is to anger, then seek instead an opportunity to be gracious and encouraging. If the temptation is to lust, then put it off by serving someone. Occupy yourself with righteousness (it is your breastplate!), and sin will have to wait!

NEGATE THE LIES. Satan is a liar and so is the flesh. The heart is deceitful above all else. They distort the truth. They tell you what is false: things like "it is not so bad;" "you can't help it;" or "you deserve better." Negate the lie of hypocrisy. Faith without works is dead. This is putting on the belt of truth.

DRAW THE SWORD. Here is your offensive weapon, the word of God. You need to have scriptures at hand for the temptations you face. You need to preach them to yourself in the midst of battle. In response to the temptation to give in to depression, for example, Psalm 42:5 (Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God!) In response to the temptation to fear or worry preach and claim Psalm 84:11 or Psalm 119:68. Certainly, use all the verses in this lesson. You must make preparation for this.

FIRM. ENDURE in executing the strategy above. Stay with it. Withstand. Hold on. Draw strength from accountability. Call on friends in the Lord to add their exhortation to your resistance. Use them to bolster your determination not to sin against God.

Remember the temptation will not last forever. 1 Peter 5:10 is an incentive to continue to resist. "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

Conclusion

We started out talking about how crucial it is to execute the plan. What is true for a game plan is also true for the reality of battle with the flesh in its attempt to beat down Christ's disciples. The plan is to stand firm. Learn the plan. Live the plan. Execute the plan!