

It Is Written

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RESISTING THE DEVIL

By Steven Harper

In his writings compiled and now known as *The Art of War*, the great Chinese military leader Sun Tzu said, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." Hopefully, we who are believers know we have an enemy — a spiritual adversary — but do we know him? There is a big difference between knowing he exists and knowing him. Would we recognize his attempts to hinder or prevent us altogether from reaching that goal?

As we strive for the eternal reward, we must know that we must daily battle our spiritual adversary, and that every day we must also ensure we are focused on the goal. Our enemy is not giving up and the road will not necessarily get easier. Our spiritual adversary will use many ways and many methods of achieving victory over us, and he will quite often be successful because (1) we underestimate him, (2) we don't know much about him, or (3) we don't resist him. The admonition that will serve as the basis for this article comes from the words of James: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). Now, he would like you to believe his victory is just inevitable, but don't believe him! God tells us through the words of James that if we resist him, he will flee. Not "might" flee, but "will" flee! Again, resistance is not an option because he will stand in your way; he will try to hinder you; he will try to lead you astray; and he will do anything and everything he can do to keep you from reaching your intended destination. Resistance is required! So, how may we successfully do that?

Know the Truth. The devil is the father of all lies, so it is no surprise that he will use lies and deception to lead men astray. In the greatest example of one resisting the devil — the temptation of Jesus — we find that, each time the devil tempted Him, He answered with Scripture, saying, "It is written" (cf. Matt. 4:1-11). In this, Jesus shows us the one thing that can successfully overcome the lies and deception of our spiritual adversary: TRUTH!

To be able to wield the truth, we have to know the truth. Paul's admonition to Timothy to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2nd Tim. 2:15) is applicable here, for we must not only know what God's word says, but also what it means and how it applies in each situation. Knowing truth, but wrongly applying it, will not successfully counter lies and deception!

Cultivate and Maintain Discernment. Just as important in our resistance is the willingness to clarify matters our spiritual adversary has muddled and confused, and it begins with the improvement and mastery of our personal ability to discern between good and evil, right and wrong, and other issues that pertain to our spiritual lives and the spiritual condition of others.

Mankind is often confused over spiritual matters simply because of a lack of knowledge and the ability to discern good from evil, truth from lies, and righteousness from unrighteousness. The disciple is admonished to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2); we are reminded that we should be "finding out what is acceptable to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10); and we should be growing in the faith that they might be able to discern between good and evil (cf. Heb. 5:14). To be able

to prove what is good, we must know what is good; to be able to separate truth from the lies, we must know what truth is; and to be able to discern between good and evil, we must know what God calls 'good.' Again, we find that the primary means of resisting the devil in his efforts to confuse is knowing God's word.

Let us also not ignore the many issues we will face in life that are not spiritually related, but matters the devil has done much to sow the seeds of confusion. In the science realm, the devil has encouraged men to take evidence and invent conclusions regarding our origin that purposefully excludes a Divine Creator; he has encouraged many to make choices based on feelings and not reality or evidence and we are seeing a generation of people who are confused about gender; he has convinced many that as long as it is legal, it is acceptable, including divorce for any reason, same-sex marriage, abortion, alcohol and drug use, and a host of otherwise immoral acts our society is beginning to believe, or already believes, is reasonable and acceptable. At no time should society be the determinant of right or wrong, and those who know God must know what He says about all matters, and then stand firmly with Him. Inaction and an unwillingness to get involved in the discussion has gotten us to where we are today. It's time we stood for what is right, regardless of what society may think or do.

Keep Our Eyes Constantly on the Goal. Since our spiritual adversary is doing all he can to hinder some from ever believing, the believing from ever growing in the faith, and the gospel's spread by obstruction, the most obvious means of resisting his efforts is by keeping our eyes on the goal and continually advancing anyway. As long as we resist his efforts and continue doing what we should be doing, he will fail.

Our spiritual adversary has already convinced many there is no such thing as heaven or hell or God or even that he exists, but we know better! Though he would have us believe that obtaining God's forgiveness is not possible and eternal life in heaven is beyond our reach, we know better! Though he would constantly try to discourage us by reminding us of our failings and constantly accusing us, we know God is gracious and ready to forgive (cf. Psalms 86:5). Do we still fail our Lord? Do we still sin? Yes, but let us remember the words of the writer to the Hebrews, who admonishes us, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

And let us not forget the words of Paul when he wrote: "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14). When the devil throws up a roadblock, run through it, go over it, or go around it — but don't let him stop you or even hinder you! Never forget the reward is for those who are faithful to the end (cf. 2nd Timothy 4:7, 8). Don't give up!

Confront Temptations. Here is where we must be most alert because it is in temptations he will use every effort to defeat us. Our response is not simply to ignore it and hope it will go away, or that he will go away; he never gives up entirely!

God promised a means of escape for every temptation (1st Corinthians 10:13), and that 'way' is the written word of God, the Bible. Sometimes, though, it is wiser to flee for the moment (2nd Timothy 2:22; 1st Corinthians 10:14). Eventually, we will have to confront our desires (James 1:14) and why certain temptations are temptations, for we must know they will come again.

Our enemy's efforts will make life difficult, but we can defeat him. Resist!