



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 183

The Christian life is an interesting life, for it is a life of contrasts, a dichotomy. It is both a life of peace and a life of conflict. Whereas the unsaved person is at war with God and at peace with sin, the Christian is at peace with God (Romans 5:1) and at war with sin (Galatians 5:16-17).

Enemies of the Christian – Martin Luther said that believers face three enemies – the world, the flesh, and the devil. Before Christ, we were completely enslaved to all these forces, following and obeying their dictates (Ephesians 2:1-3). But Christ has defeated the world, the flesh, and the devil, and has freed us from their dominion; and as Christians we are now engaged in a continuous battle against these. We can see that two of these are external enemies, the world and the devil, and one is internal, the flesh. Though we can distinguish these, all three are interconnected, and work together to oppose the Christian.

The world – The first major enemy of the Christian is the world. By saying that the world is an enemy of the Christian, we are not talking about God’s creation, which was originally created “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Rather, we are referring to the fallen world system, that is, the culture, principles, customs, values, system or way of life that is against God, His truth, and those who follow Him (John 15:18-19; 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 2:15-17).

The flesh – The second major enemy of the Christian is the flesh (Romans 8:4-8; Ephesians 2:3). By referring to the flesh we are not talking about our physical bodies. Such a misunderstanding throughout church history has resulted in the teaching that our spirits are good but our physical bodies are evil. This however is not a biblical idea but one that crept into Christian thinking from Greek philosophy, which taught that the spiritual is good and sacred, but the physical imperfect and undesirable.

Contrary to this, the Bible clearly teaches the essential goodness of God’s physical creation, including our physical bodies. And even though due to the fall our bodies are also fallen, they are not inherently evil. Thus, in talking about the flesh Paul is referring to the remnants of sin that is still within us, which remains in us in this life until our glorification. Our fallen nature is in opposition to God, and affects not only our body, but also our mind, heart and soul. Accordingly, sin originates not from the physical body but from our remaining fallen or sinful nature, which manifests itself not only through the actions of our bodies, but also through evil thoughts, desires, and heart attitudes (2 Corinthians 7:1).

So when Paul speaks about the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit in the Christian life, he is not referring to the conflict between the body and the spirit; rather, he is talking about the war between our fallen nature and the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17), between our sinful and spiritual natures, between our old life that wants to rule us again, and our new life wrought and preserved by the Spirit.

The devil – Finally, the third major enemy of the Christian is the devil. Very few people believe in the existence of a personal being known as the devil or Satan. Satan is mostly relegated to the realm of superstition or myth. Contrary to this, the Bible clearly affirms the reality and existence of the devil (Matthew 4:3; 8:28-33; 9:32-33; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; 11:14; Ephesians 2:2; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9-10). The devil and his minions are real, powerful, cunning and deceptive, and do all they can to oppose God, thwart His plans, assault His Word, propagate false religion and theology, keep unbelievers under their sway, tempt, oppress and attack believers in order to hinder their spiritual growth, and bring about division and discord in the church (Ephesians 4:25-27).

If you are struggling with sin, know that such a struggle is characteristic of the normal Christian life; and as a matter of fact it is a sign that you are a believer, one who is in Christ and not in Adam, for the unregenerate have no such struggle with sin.