



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 184

Battle against sin – Throughout church history the misunderstanding that the physical world is inherently evil and that the believer’s soul is good while the body bad has led many groups to come up with unbiblical doctrines and practices. As a result many have withdrawn themselves from the world, living solitary lives, such as we see in monastic movements; refraining from ordinary physical pleasures, undertaking various forms of self-neglect, even self-flagellation and other extreme ascetic practices. These people practice such things in order to fight the world, conquer the flesh, and live holy lives. Such ideas and practices exist in Greek philosophy and world religions, but have no place in the Bible. These are nothing new for even Paul had to oppose such teachings spread by false teachers (1 Timothy 4:1-6).

With respect to the evil world system, Jesus said that even though we as believers no longer belong to this world, we still remain in the world (John 17:14-16). In Titus 2:11-12 Paul calls believers to reject worldly passions and live godly lives. God does not save us and then call us to withdraw from the world. Rather, though we are called to not follow the ungodly ways of the world and not to compromise the gospel, we are at the same time called to be in the world, defend the faith, engage the culture, be the salt and light of the world, and reach unbelievers with the gospel (Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Peter 3:15).

With respect to the devil, the Bible teaches that he is real, powerful and vicious (1 Peter 5:8); cunning and deceptive (2 Corinthians 11:14); and that he is the ruler of this evil world system (John 14:30). However, the Bible also teaches that Satan is a creature and finite, and though he is stronger than human beings, he is not omnipotent; and though he has more knowledge than human beings, he is not omniscient; nor is he omnipresent. Moreover, he is a defeated foe (Matthew 12:28-29; Colossians 2:15).

Thus, Satan is not an equal adversary of God, as some think he is; rather, he is God’s creature and subject to Him. As Martin Luther said, “the Devil is God’s Devil.” Like all secondary causes, God uses the devil to accomplish His good purposes (Romans 8:28). The devil and demons can do nothing outside the decree of God (Ephesians 1:11). Though Satan must be taken seriously, as believers we are not to fear him. Contrary to some Christian teachings and practices, though Satan and his demons can tempt, harass, hinder, and attack believers (2 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:18), those who have been regenerated by God have the Spirit of God dwelling in them (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19), and can never be possessed by the devil or demons (1 John 4:4). Rather, the Bible teaches that we who are in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, grounded in and trained by the Word of God, will be able to recognize evil, resist Satan, and triumph over him (Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-10).

All kinds of methods and formulas have been proposed in order for Christians to fight the evil world system and the devil, but a majority of these miss a very important point. They fail to understand that even if we were able to isolate ourselves from the trials and temptations of the world and the devil, our greatest enemy would still be with us, that which causes us to sin, that is, the corruption and evil desires that are within us, the remaining sinful nature, which affects our soul, mind, will, heart, and body, which is hostile and powerful, and with us all the time and wherever we go (Colossians 2:21-23).

In Mark 7:21-23 Jesus identifies the internal fallen nature as the source of sinful thoughts, words and deeds. James says the same thing in James 1:14-15. Without correctly understanding this concept, that all sin begins within, all solutions given are in reality shallow quick fixes, which cannot deliver what they promise, and end up resulting in greater confusion, failure, and despair for the struggling Christian.

So what is the biblical answer to how we are to deal with our remaining sin nature? The Bible gives us a two-part solution for the battle against sin and growth in holiness (Romans 6:13). In the next study we will dig deeper and look at the two parts of progressive sanctification in the life of the believer.