May the Holy Spirit guide you in all things

When we think about the account of Lot in Genesis, it’s easy to assume that he had no relationship with God. He lived in a city that was so evil, God destroyed it as an example of how sin will be punished. Yes, he was hospitable to the visitors who turned out to be angels, but he offered his own daughters to a hostile crowd. He whined when the angels tried to rescue him. He ended up having an incestuous relationship with his daughters that produced two nations that were a constant problem for Israel.

Yet when we get to the book of 2 Peter chapter 2, we find out that Lot was righteous in God’s sight. Now, righteous does not mean without sin. It means that he did his best to follow God in faith. What he saw going on around him bothered him and he did not conform to the way of the people of Sodom.

What we learn from this is that no matter how evil our world becomes, because of our faith in Jesus, God Himself will keep us from succumbing to worldly pressures. This doesn’t mean that we can sit back and relax in the war against sin; and, we should desperately try to avoid the mistakes that Lot made. But we have the comfort of knowing that despite our failings we are safe, because our righteousness and salvation are from God alone.

*[A]nd if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation.*

 2 Peter 2:7-9a

In Christ’s love

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 8-16-20

1 Peter 5:8

Last week, we looked at sin in the world and how the Christian ought to take special pains to avoid sin. We are called to live a holy life; this is part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are told in 1 Peter 2:9-10, “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy*.” These words are found in the Old Testament and applied to the nation of Israel; but now they are for the followers of Jesus.

Our primary duty to our God and Saviour is to bring them glory; in order to do that, we must stand apart from the world, because the world is against its creator. It is so important for us to avoid sin; we are called to be holy people. We are to reflect the light of Jesus Christ into the darkness of the world and we can’t do that if we are darkened by the stain of sin. To be a disciple of Jesus requires work and diligence on our part, but all in the strength provided by the Holy Spirit. Peter gives us a most important reason for living our lives this way in chapter 1 verses 17-19.

*If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*

When we come to accept Christ, in addition to salvation, we are adopted by God and He becomes our Father. By His marvelous grace, we can call Him Father. But we must remember that a price was paid for us, a price higher than all the money in the world: the life-blood of God’s Son. We owe God everything; we owe Him a debt we cannot repay: if God wants us to be holy, then we need to be holy. Being holy is primarily avoiding sin and doing the works God calls us to do.

In our desire and attempt to live holy lives, we have adversaries: satan, the world, and our flesh. We must control our fleshly desires. Because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit and our spirits are now alive, our spirit driven mind must control the desires of our bodies, not the other way around. Take our thoughts captive, deny ourselves sinful impulses; we pray for help, but then we do it.

The world will throw temptation at us from all sides and constantly. It makes sin look good. Hold fast to the knowledge that sin is never good and will lead to problems. We must learn to look away, to not be enticed by what the world offers, to withstand the attacks of others who deride us for not conforming to the world. Again, this strength comes through the Holy Spirit, but again, we must fight.

I wanted to spend time considering satan and his tactics. All those who refuse to accept Jesus have been deluded by satan and will suffer eternally for this delusion. This is the justice of God. Adam and Eve were both tempted in the garden, but they ultimately made the decision to disobey God, so they had to suffer the consequences. Each person is ultimately responsible for their sin and for rejecting Christ. Once we become Christians, the devil can no longer have our soul; it is safe in God’s hands. However, he will still do his best to make you ineffective as a disciple of Jesus. He will temp you to sin so that your fellowship with God is strained and your testimony is stained. He will bind you up with thoughts and ideas that will keep you from doing God’s work.

Keep in mind that satan cannot read your thoughts and he can only be in one place at a time. But satan has lots of fallen angels who do his work. When we talk about satan tempting you, we are actually referring to one of his minions. They are all very good at tempting us and leading us astray. You will probably never deal with satan himself; he has bigger fish to fry.

We have already seen some of his tactics in the Garden of Eden. He led Eve to focus on the fruit that she couldn’t have so that she didn’t think about all the wonderful things God had blessed her with. He does this still; it is one of his main tactics. This is why it is so important for a Christian to develop a habit of thanking and praising God for His blessings. It keeps us focused on what we do have, which is really far more than we could hope for.

The other thing satan did in the garden was to insinuate that God was holding out on Eve, that there were better things she could have that God was keeping her from. We know from the Bible and we know from experience that the Lord really does know what is best for us. He does love us and He will not withhold any good gift that goes along with His purposes. Ultimately, His purposes include the very best for us. This requires us to trust in God’s provision.

In our text today, Peter uses a very revealing word: adversary. Satan is actually and consciously against us; it is his self-appointed task to cause us difficulty and hinder us in any good works that glorify God. If he were not restrained, satan would kill us. Peter’s word “devour” is not an overstatement. He can be very subtle and we can never let down our guard.

One of satan’s tactics is to make us envious of unbelievers who seem to be having a wonderful life. They never give a thought to God and even deny His existence; yet they are happy and wealthy and seem to be without problems. I invite you to read Psalm 73. This Psalm considers this exact scenario. The Psalmist starts to become envious of the wicked because they do so well. On top of that, while the Psalmist worships the Lord, it seems that he has more than his share of trouble. Then, the gracious Lord gives him understanding:

*When I pondered to understand this,
It was troublesome in my sight
Until I came into the sanctuary of God;
Then I perceived their end.
Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.
How they are destroyed in a moment!
They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!
Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.*

The Lord allows these people a good life because their eternity will be in hell. Yes, Christians suffer in this life, but all of it will work out for our good. Keep in mind that we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and just passing through this world. Sometimes we do start feeling sorry for ourselves when we see the unbelievers prosper. This is an attack from satan. He is shifting our focus from the blessings we have to the perceived blessings that others have. We resist it by remembering their end, satan’s end, and how we will spend eternity.

Another attack of satan is very closely related; he will tempt us to focus on all our own troubles. We all have difficulties in this life and some of them are extremely trying; I don’t mean to belittle the pain of anything we go through. There are promises in the Bible regarding trials that we must keep in mind and satan will do his best to help us forget them. When our minds are totally consumed by our problems, we are not advancing the Kingdom of God.

First is to remember that Jesus promised that we would have troubles in this life. Especially, we will have troubles simply for being His disciple. But He promises that we will be blessed in these trials. Also, Paul, Peter, and James all describe the benefits of going through trouble. The pain we go through will strengthen us in Christ as long as we keep our eyes on Him. Trial develops perseverance, which the Bible tells us is absolutely necessary to make it through this life and into eternal life. Difficulties bring us into a mature and more meaningful relationship with Jesus. Our goal is to be more like Jesus; Jesus suffered during His time on earth, so to be like Him includes suffering as He did.

When you find yourself thinking of nothing but your troubles, realize that satan is attacking. Resist him. Prayerfully lay your problems on Jesus and He will bring you through. Know that when you persevere through pain, you are bringing glory to God right in front of His enemies.

Do you ever find yourself dwelling on past sins? This is another way that satan will distract you from doing what God has for you to do. (By the way, to neglect what God has for us to do is sin because we are going against His will.) When we dwell on past sins, that guilt starts to rise up again. This leads us to thinking that maybe we weren’t really forgiven. The question in our mind becomes, “If I was forgiven, why am I remembering this sin and feeling guilty again?” If we allow this thought long enough, it turns into wondering if we are really saved.

Satan will bring up past sins; that is what he does, he is the accuser of the brethren. He will bring up anything, he will accuse us of anything. That is why Jesus is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us; Jesus is the answer to any accusation by satan. Here is where we must stand firmly on our faith. The Bible tells us that Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross was more than sufficient to atone for our sins. The Bible tells us that when we believe on Jesus as Saviour, all our sins are forgiven immediately and forever. God casts our sins into the sea of forgetfulness; He does not remember them.

We do remember our sins. This can be a good thing if it helps us to keep from doing them again. It becomes a bad thing if we allow satan to paralyze us into inaction. When we feel those fiery darts of guilt over past sins, take out the shield of faith. We are forgiven in Jesus and are righteous before God. It is acceptable for us to do work in the name of Jesus.

Although satan has many ways of tempting us and making us ineffective as God’s soldiers, I will touch on just one more. This one involves individual Christians but has its effect on the church; especially on the local body of Christ. Satan will constantly try to divide a church body.

When we studied the book of Ephesians, we saw that one of the most important concepts in a church is unity. Unity does not mean that everyone agrees on everything. Unity does not mean peace at any price. Christian unity can be achieved even when very different personalities would normally conflict. Unity comes from believing the clear, fundamental doctrines of the Bible and having the goal of setting aside ourselves for the glory of God and the benefit of others.

Basically, there are certain beliefs necessary to be a Christian. We believe that Jesus Christ is our only salvation; we believe that the Bible is the word of God. These are indisputable and unity has its foundation in ideas like these. Next, there are things that the Bible is less clear on. For example, the timing of the rapture or predestination verses free will. We can have strong, biblically based ideas on these subjects, but they are not reason to go our separate ways. Mature Christians can have discussions about these things without affecting unity. In other words, there are some subjects we can have different beliefs on and still be biblical Christians within the same church body.

Interestingly, one of the biggest hinderances to church unity can simply be personality clashes or a difference of opinion over nonbiblical issues. Churches have split over the location of the communion table or the color of curtains. This is where a true maturity is needed; this is where we must actually live out the Christian principle of holding others in higher regard than ourselves. If two strong personalities have a conflict, they need to submit to a mediator for the good of the body of Christ. If you want red curtains and everybody else wants blue, its time to stop fighting for red and help the others hang the blue. Ultimately, when the Lord creates the new heaven and the new earth, all the existing curtains and communion tables will be burned up.

The bottom line is that we have an enemy. He hates us because we belong to God and he hates God. He will do everything he can to devour us. This is why it is so important for us to stay in the word as brought to us in the Bible; stay in communication with God through Jesus Christ in prayer; and remain in fellowship with other believers. These three things, overseen by the power of the Holy spirit, will keep us free from satan’s snares, and cause him disgrace while glorifying God.

Prayer

Lord God, we realize that sin is something You despise; that satan has chosen to rebel against You and will work against Your goodness until His final hour. It is tragic that Your good creation has so often chosen to side with him. Even we Your people, allow ourselves to be swayed by him and are seduced by his cunning.

In spite of our rebellion, in Your great mercy, You have made a way for us to be brought back into fellowship with You; through Your Son, Jesus Christ. We deserved no such kindness. We humbly thank You for the cleansing blood that has washed us of our guilt and ask for continued restoration for each of those times that, even now, we fail You.

Thank You for the wonderful blessing of the indwelling Holy Spirit. May He now work with power in our lives, not for our glory, but to keep us from offending You; You are deserving and worthy of all our love and devotion. Help us to recognize the deceptions of the evil one, and rely completely on You in faith.

It is in Jesus name we pray these things

Amen