

"The Battle for Your Soul"

You may not realize it, but you—yes you—are in a serious spiritual battle. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're going to talk about the battle for our souls.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We pray that the Lord's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. And this means we must take the time to learn the will of the Lord by a serious and sincere study of the word of God and we must practice what it teaches. Psalm 119 verses 1 to 3 says, "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!" We want God to bless us, and we know that we must listen to God if we're to please Him. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

We live in a chaotic world with many conflicting voices calling us to believe this or to do that. The voice of God in Scripture will tell us the truth, while the world's many voices will try to lead us away from God. Some voices encourage us to leave our faith and follow the world. Some will tell us "there is no God", or "the Bible isn't true," or "we're the products of evolution," or "Christians are mean." Well others will tell us that our sins don't matter. Now if we believe the lies that the world tells, we can be lead astray just as Eve was in Genesis 3. We're facing an ideological battle and a moral battle for our souls. I hope this gets your attention! Whether we believe and follow Christ or believe a lie and follow the world will determine how God will deal with us in eternity. Are you committed to Christ? Are you listening to His Word? Are you winning or losing the battle for your soul?

Now if you want to study more, we offer this study free. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free online at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Ephesians 6, verses 10 to 13, and we'll consider the battle for your soul.

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 10 to 13. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." That's a reading from God's Holy Word. Let's pray. Father we're grateful that You have outfitted us with the equipment that we need to fight in this great battle for our souls. And Father help us to be strong in the Lord and in His might. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

We're at war with the devil, and he's a formidable opponent. He's had many centuries to exploit human weaknesses so that he can lead us into sin and defeat us. Now this battle is a personal one, like hand-to-hand combat between two soldiers. And at the end of such a fight in ancient times, one soldier was standing and the other was dead. This battle is like a wrestling match, where two people were personally involved eye to eye. And you cannot pass this battle off to somebody else; you must face the devil yourself. Now he has watched you and he knows your strengths and weaknesses. And

he'll use every trick he knows to defeat you. He has no qualms about cheating, lying, or using dirty tricks to win. Now he's serious about defeating you and he intends to win.

This spiritual battle isn't just for your life; it's for your soul and the souls of your loved ones. It's the most important conflict that you'll ever face. And if you're not aware that you're in a fight, you will surely lose. If you don't have the will to fight, you will most certainly lose. If you're not prepared to fight, you cannot win. If you fight but you don't give it all that you have, you can still lose your soul. Your enemy, the devil, will do anything, anything, to capture your soul. And if that means trickery, he'll lie and he'll twist God's word to suit his purposes.

The apostle Paul particularly warned Christians to hold to the truth. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4 verses 2 to 4, "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled only to those who are perishing. In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Now the devil blinds people to the truth, so they'll believe a lie and be lost. When people leave the Word, they leave the truth. So the devil twists and tampers with the Bible. Now to tamper with the word of God is to distort it or make it appear false by deception. Satan tampers with the Word to make it teach something that it doesn't actually say. Now the person who uses God's word cunningly just to advance his agenda is in Paul's eyes disgraceful and underhanded.

Scripture reveals how Satan's schemes follow a common pattern. And if we understand the way that he operates, we can prepare for Satan's challenges. Satan, first, loves to ask questions that create doubt in the Word of God. You remember that in the Garden of Eden, the devil asked Eve, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'" (that's Genesis 3 and verse 2)? Now, Satan knew what God had said; he wasn't asking the question to learn the truth or to do the will of God. Rather he asked the question to create doubt in God! He wanted Eve to question God. Doubting the truth is the first step to apostasy. The Devil will always give you all the reasons you should not do the will of God. He wants you to forget doing things God's way, and to think for yourself, and to do what you think is best for you. By urging you to do what is self-focused, he gets you to go against God. He wants you to think you know more than God.

Satan, second, contradicts what God says. When Eve told Satan that she would die if she ate of that fruit or even touch it, the devil said, "Well you shall surely not die" (Genesis 3 and verse 4). The devil has no qualms about lying to achieve his purpose. Satan always wants people to place their confidence in him not God. Satan claims that God has deceived you, but he knows what is really true. Well this desire to know Satan's secrets and to be one of the elite has led many unfortunate souls down the path to perdition. You see, he appeals to the worst in people: their flesh, their eyes, and their pride. He makes them feel God is holding them down and cheating them out of some pleasure or some knowledge.

The Lord Jesus told some Jews who followed Satan in John 8 and verse 44, that "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and doesn't stand in the truth because there's no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Now all you have to do to promote a lie is to tamper with the truth just a little. Take rat poison, rat poison is 98 percent corn meal and only two percent poison. Now if it weren't mostly corn meal, the rats wouldn't eat it; but two percent of poison is enough to kill the rat. Now a little lie can still keep you out of heaven. Buy the truth and do not sell it.

Satan appeals to what you want to hear and he makes you feel so good. And Eve was deceived by Satan's lie. The devil likes to turn things upside down. He makes what is evil appear good and appealing, and he makes what's good appear evil and ugly. You remember, God said in Isaiah 5 and verse 20, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" Have you noticed how our world has labeled anything righteous as being wrong, while things that are evil are all of a sudden made attractive and enticing? Well that's the devil's scheme.

Satan, third, produces an alternate version of "truth." You see he enticed Eve with these words found in Genesis 3 and verse 5: he says, "Why God knows that when you eat of it (that is of this fruit) that your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil." You see the devil's alternative mixes truth with error. There is enough truth to sound persuasive, but his message is full of misrepresentations and distortions. "Add it all up and the bottom line is that it's just a big lie." Satan wants everyone to believe that he has a better way, that God is trying to fool you, and that God is not your friend but is cheating you out of something really good. His strategy is to get people to rely upon him for real "progress." That his alternative ways, they sound appealing, but of course in the end what they do is to destroy those who follow it.

Satan, fourth, despises and persecutes anyone who exposes him. Jesus explained in John 3 verses 19 to 20, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and doesn't come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." Now Jesus knew that if the world hated Him, that it would also hate his disciples too when they preach the truth about sin. The devil loves to put down the church and the truth of the Bible. Peter said in 1 Peter 4 and verse 14, that "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, then you're blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." The devil is a bully, but God sees everything and rewards those who follow Him. If you hold to the truth and righteousness, be sure the devil will despise you and speak evil about you.

Satan, fifth, pretends to be holy. Now Paul spoke about some deceivers in 2 Corinthians 11 verses 13 to 15. They pretended to be men of God, but they actually served Satan. "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it's no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds." You know in order to deceive Christians and lead them into his "alternative" churches, the devil pretends to be a Christian leader. There are religions today that pretend to follow the Lord Jesus, but the more you observe them, the more you realize they're not God's people.

With high-sounding phrases, Satan tries to persuade people that Christianity is like a smorgasbord of ideas, from which you can pick and choose whatever doctrines you like, and throw away the others of course. There are thousands of denominations in America, each teaching different doctrines and wearing different names. It's become popular to follow some man's ministry rather than listen to the Word of God. This is the devil's work. He's the one who provides heresies. And heresies are divisive false teachings that lead people astray and divide the church.

Now if you listen to the devil, you'll come to believe that there's no such thing as heresy, that every view is equally good. And when you believe that, you've fallen into the trap of the devil. He tried to convince Eve to quit listening to God and to trust her own reasoning. When people ignore the Bible, the Word of God, and they start listening to the beliefs of men, they fall prey to the devil's schemes. Their eyes become blind to the truth. God's ways and man's ways are not the same. You can't ignore

God's Word, and build your house upon sand, and expect everything to be all right between you and God, no. Eve was deceived, she lost sight of God, and did what she wanted to do. And if we're deceived, and we lose sight of God, and do what we want to do, then we too will have to face the consequences of sin.

Number six, Satan preys on the weak and the ignorant. Peter said in 1 Peter 5 verses 8 to 9, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." The devil is looking for gullible people who will fall prey to his immoral lifestyle and his disobedience to God. He uses false prophets and false churches as alternatives to the truth. He whispers to our consciences that we can sin and not be hurt by it. He is deceptive.

And no matter how appealing his message is, the devil's goal is your spiritual death. So... resist him, firm in your faith. Pay close attention to the Word of God. Keep your eyes focused on the cross. God hasn't left us alone to fight the devil. Paul said in Ephesians 6 verses 13 to 17, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Now these things will help you in your struggle for righteousness. You know, whenever you have this righteousness, the gospel of peace, when you have faith, when you have salvation, and when you have the word of God. This armor will protect you from the devil's weapons, but the sword of the Spirit, God's Word, it's a formidable weapon. It has the truth that pierces hearts and souls. And the best thing that you can do is to fight Satan, and to do it you've got to know the Word of God. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4 and verse 4). Oh how we need the word of God; and nothing else, nothing else will do. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we're so thankful that as we fight this great battle, that we don't have to fight it alone, that we have the strength of Your Son, and that we have that full armor that can protect us. Father help us to fight Satan, and his lies, with everything that's within us. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

When people follow their own desires rather than listen to and obey God, the devil wins and they lose. My friend, what about you? Is the devil tricking you? If the Lord and His Word doesn't rule in your life, you'll have a master who lies to you to take your soul away. If you follow the devil, he'll take you where you don't want to go. Let Jesus be Lord of your life. To get right with God and to overcome the devil, you need the Lord's help. You can't win by your own strength. When Christ is in you and you are in Him, He'll give you the help and the strength that you need to overcome Satan. Ephesians 6 verses 10 and 11 says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

Now to become a Christian, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Son of God, our Savior and the risen Lord. Out of love, repent of every sin and start living as God teaches. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Be baptized or immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven. Galatians 3 verses 26 to 27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." My friends live the Christian life. Get involved at church. The closer you are to God, the easier it becomes to resist the

devil. Do it for yourself, and do it for those that you love. Your strong faith will lead others to place their faith in the Lord as well. Don't let another day go by, till you have made your life right with the living God. Why not be obedient to Him today?

Well perhaps you've considered your battle for your soul and you want to know more about these matters. Well we offer this lesson free to anyone who asks. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you get a hold of us, don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

We ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. And so we ask that you keep searching God's Word, and do it diligently, search God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always from week to week we tell you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.