

FIGHTING THE WARFARE OF FAITH

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“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;” - I Timothy 4:1

Some concepts in Scripture are difficult to comprehend. The Trinity, the Sovereignty of God, His Omnipresence come to mind as truths that far surpass our abilities to fully grasp. The above passage, however, is not in that category. Paul emphasizes that the Spirit “speaketh expressly;” in other words, it is a clear, unambiguous certainty that instead of earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 2), as we are exhorted by Jude, some will depart from the faith. This passage should cause the child of God to pause and examine himself. Why does this happen? The passage clearly tells us. People depart from the faith because they listen and fall prey to ungodly, seductive influences that corrupt from the simplicity that is in Christ. How can this happen to me? It happens when I fail to obey the command to love the Lord with all of my mind. (Mark 12:30) The battle for the mind is not a battle we often contemplate. We too often battle our actions, restraining our words and deeds. The truth is that if we only battle our actions, we are only fighting the effect, not the source. The mind is the source of the sins of action. Individuals do not depart from the faith spontaneously. Instead, the departure comes as a result of the mind not being brought to the obedience of Christ. (II Cor. 10:5)

Below, we will discuss several issues of our present day that may be seductive attempts by Satan to cause God’s people to depart from the faith. Our prayer is that God’s people would not only not depart from the faith, but not even slip in the faith, and if we have to any degree slipped in the faith, to be spurred by this article to again earnestly contend for the faith. In this article, we will examine three dangers in the battle for the mind.

THREE DANGERS

The first danger in the battle for the mind is being naive. Notice in our text that Paul uses the word “seducing.” Consider the example of Satan’s seduction of Eve in the garden. His appeals to her were alluring and appealing to her ego. She would be wise. However, from the moment that Adam and Eve partook of the fruit, it is certain that they would have given anything to not have the knowledge of the shame of their nakedness, the ever present reality of sin. In Proverbs 7, the simple youth had no guard against the seductive lies heaped upon him by the harlot, who was “subtil of heart.” (Proverbs 7:10) It was not until the dart struck his liver did he realize just how naive he had been. Thus, John would exhort us in I John 4:1 to not believe “every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out in the world.” Paul had a pastor’s heart for the Corinthians. In II Corinthians 11:3, he confessed that his fear was that “as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” We must not be naive regarding the presence of evil ideas present in our world. We must test every teaching we hear by the word of God.

The second danger closely relates to the first, and that is the danger of ignorance. If we do not know the word of God thoroughly, we are helpless to confront erroneous teachings which may result in our departing from the faith. After warning young Timothy of the existence of “evil men and seducers” in II Timothy 3, he then gives Timothy the following weapons to use: “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (II Timothy 3:14-17) Paul gives Timothy two related instructions. First, he tells Timothy to trust what he has been taught

because he knows the people who have taught him. What wonderful instruction this is. We should be very wary of any teaching or idea that runs counter to what our parents, pastor, and faithful children of God have taught us. Is there perfect safety in this? No, because parents, pastors, and faithful children of God are not perfect. However, this is an excellent starting place when testing ideas. The second instruction, however, is perfect. Paul points Timothy with unreserved confidence to the Word of God. It thus follows that we must be students of the Word of God if we are to have victory over seductive spirits and doctrines of devils. We cannot have any confidence of walking worthy of our vocation without constant time gleaning from God's Word.

The last danger we will ponder is the danger of instability. Hebrews 13:9 instructs: "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace..." Being close minded is seen as one of the greatest evils of our day. However, when it comes to the truths of God's Word, we should be so established in the truth that we are not as "...children, tossed to and from, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;"(Eph. 4:14) Paul criticizes those in II Timothy who were "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."(II Timothy 3:7) Stability in the midst of conflicting and confusing ideas is a tremendous virtue. Confidence in the Lord and confidence in the timeless relevance of the Word of God will keep us and will alert us to the seductive influences of our day.

This message relies completely on our confidence in the Word of God. Below, we will examine the value of the word of God and the importance of handling it properly.

The young poet pondered the unthinkable: "Jesus, and shall it ever be, A mortal man ashamed of Thee ... that dear Friend On whom my hopes of heaven depend!"(Daddy, please insert the proper footnotes. This hymn is No. 195 in the No. 11 edition of the OSH). However, Paul warns Timothy that the unthinkable is entirely possible. Though in periods of spiritual refreshment even slipping in the faith seems distant, the reality of our dual nature tells us that when our minds are not submitted to Christ, we can slip and even depart from the faith.

We have already examined the battle for the mind and discussed three very real dangers – that of being naive to the seductive workings of Satan, of ignorance of the Word of God, and of instability in our Christian walk. These dangers are avoidable, and God has provided the very thing we need to not succumb to the unrelenting, devious assaults of Satan against our souls. The Word of God is the most valuable possession of a Christian. Value normally is expressed not in its abundance but in its rarity. Diamonds are more valuable than dirt because diamonds are more difficult to find than dirt. In God's economy, the most valuable possession a Christian possesses is abundantly available. It is the very instrument with which we ward off temptation and with which we find the spiritual food, instruction, and promises that cause us to yearn for fellowship with the Almighty and make the very thought of departing the faith entirely distasteful.

THE VALUE OF THE WORD

What makes the Bible so valuable? Why is it to be esteemed above riches, above our necessary food? Following are seven affirmations from Scriptures of the value of the Word.

- It is the Word of God. II Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Literally, "Scripture is God breathed." David, in Psalm 8, was awed by the excellent nature of God and proclaimed, O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens." It is jaw-droppingly incredible to realize that the God Who was in the beginning, Who was before the beginning, who calls the stars by name, Whose glory is above the heavens, Who must condescend to behold the things that are in heaven(Psalm 113:6), Who shall forever reign over all, this very God has penned something for his saints to read. He has penned His autobiography, and He has penned it for our benefit, for our learning. He has preserved it throughout the centuries to give a testimony to His

glory, and He has preserved it for you, the saint, at this very stage in your life, to assist you in striving for the faith, to give you the exact instruction you need to glorify Him and not succumb to any evil seduction. In breathing the Word of God, God is revealing Himself, providing an understanding of exactly Who He is. While the heavens declare His glory, and a vital, saving knowledge of God is immediately provided through the Spirit, the converting, sanctifying, enabling knowledge of God is provided through His Word. Imagine a life with no Bible. How would we know of His omnipotence? How would we know the glory of God in creating this universe? How would we know of His governance over creation? We would not have the comfort of knowing of His pending return. We would not be able to rejoice to read of fulfilled prophecy. Contemplating life without the revelation of God through His Word should confirm to us the unspeakable value of the revelation of His Word.

- It is Truth. John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” This value is particularly relevant in the age in which we live. Not only are many divergent philosophies and religious ideas presented as truth, but also many say that there are no absolute truths, that truth is relative. Often these arguments are presented quite convincingly. The pursuit of truth can be quite confusing and laden with danger. What is truth? Is there truth? The above Scripture answers these vital questions. There is a place where truth is found, where truth is always found – God’s Word. God’s Word will never deceive, never mislead, never lie. A friend, a loved one, even a preacher might unwittingly mislead or misrepresent truth. God’s Word never does that. God’s Word sets us apart to display His glory precisely because it is truth. Because it is truth, absolute truth, pure truth, unmitigated truth, complete truth, it follows that it has authority over the life of a Christian. We are obligated to comply with the instruction of the Word because it is truth, because it reveals Truth, Jesus Christ.
- It gives hope. Romans 15:4 “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Earlier we imagined a world in which God had not revealed Himself as fully as He has in scripture. That world is a world without hope. Hope is a confident expectation. Scripture assures us of the pending defeat of Satan, evil, sin, sickness, sadness, temptation, trials, sorrow, mourning, tears, evil schemes, injustice, and all other things that plague the soul. Scripture proclaims the good news of a Savior, of Immanuel – God dwelling with man, of a Ransom, of the Prince of Peace, of the Kinsman Redeemer, of the Everlasting Father, of mercy and truth meeting together, of the Substitute, of the Elder Brother, of a Shepherd who would not stop until He had found the sheep that was lost. Scripture assures us that He is coming back to earth, and that the bodies of our departed loved ones will be raised from the grave, no matter how remote the grave may be. Scripture tells of a successful Savior, who died for sinners, not just sin. Scripture tells of the resurrection of the Lamb of God, and that all of His chosen ones were represented by the Lamb in His death, burial, and resurrection. Simply put, Scripture provides hope in a sad, dark, hopeless world. It doesn’t take long to roam a city street or visit a college classroom, or survey a large stadium and find many without hope. That picture would be far broader without the inestimable blessing of Scripture.
- It enables the child of God to overcome the wicked one. I John 2:14b “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” This passage links the word of God abiding in the child of God and victory over the temptations of Satan. Jesus also links the two when He rebuffed Satan on three occasions by using the Word of God. Ephesians 6 identifies the Word of God as “the sword of the Spirit.” The value of the Word is expressed here in its practicality. When the child of God is immersed in the Word, is skillful in the Word, is submissive to the Word, Satan is overcome. This is no small feat. Satan is ferocious and unrelenting in His evil intent towards God and as a result, God’s people. He seeks to devour the Christian’s soul by any means necessary. Alone, the Christian is insufficient for the engagement. With the Word of God, the wicked one is overcome and departs.

- It endures. Matthew 24:35 “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” Fashion changes, faces become wrinkled, loved ones depart, buildings are constructed and removed in one generation. Nothing of life lived under the sun lasts forever, except one thing. Even earth, which seems so permanent, so indestructible, will be burnt and consumed. The only thing that we possess that is truly permanent, is the Word of God. Because it is permanent, it is timeless. It never loses its relevancy. Society changes, technology changes, generations pass, but the Word of God is a constant. This is rather remarkable that words penned thousands of years ago are still perfectly relevant in our lifetime. It is essential that the Christian recognize this truth. Regardless of what the wisdom of the day may be, God’s Word endures to all generations. It remains and always shall remain. It continues to be the standard for faith, for practice, for life. As one wise man preached, “These truths will stand when the world is on fire!”
- It can be grasped. Psalm 119:130 “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” It has been remarked that the sign of true genius is the ability to take the complex and make it understandable to the masses. The Word of God does precisely that. One doesn’t need an advanced degree, higher education, or even formal education to benefit from the Word of God. This is a mind bending truth. God, Who cannot be searched out, cannot be contained, whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts far exceed our thoughts, reveals Himself to us in His Word and we can understand. This is not to say that years of study will provide a complete, full understanding of God and Scripture. One who has been enlightened by the Spirit, however, can come to a basic understanding of the person, nature, and character of God, of salvation, and of the instructions and corrections that will thoroughly furnish for all good works.
- God values His Word. Psalm 138:2 “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” God esteems His Word even above His own name. Perhaps this is because His Word gives a correct understanding of what His name entails. It is one thing to claim love for God. It is far more meaningful to evidence true love for God by complying with the commands of His Word.

Sir Walter Scott wrote these words in reference to scripture: “Within this wondrous volume lies the mystery of mysteries, Happiest they of human race to whom their God has given grace to read, to fear, to hope, to pray, to lift the latch, to find the way; And better had they ne’er been born Who read to laugh, or read to scorn.” Surely this man recognized the value of God’s Word. The blessed man in Psalm 1 also recognized the value of the Word of God by make it his delight, his constant meditation. Notice that the blessed man expressed his appreciation for the value of scripture by constantly using it. In a museum, the most valuable items are put on display behind thick glass and menacing guards. The most valuable item on earth, God’s Word, has no such barriers. Its value is manifested by how much it is handle, how often it is consulted. The sad commentary of the writer of Hebrews in chapter 5 was that his audience had not properly valued the Word of God. Because they were not skillful through constant use, they were not equipped to discern between good and evil.