

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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THE OPERATING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE

AND JESUS ANSWERED SAYING TO THEM, "HAVE FAITH IN GOD" (MARK 11:22).

THE SUN IS PERHAPS THE MOST CREDIBLE OBJECT OF FAITH FOR THE WORLD. IT APPEARS TO BE IMMUTABLE. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE, 24 HOURS OF EVERY DAY, 365 DAYS A YEAR. WITHOUT THE SUN, PEOPLE COULDN'T LIVE. IF THE SUN DIDN'T RISE TOMORROW MORNING, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE WORLD'S FAITH? ALL OF HUMANITY WOULD BE THROWN INTO CONFUSION. IF WE HAVE SUCH GREAT FAITH IN THE SUN, WHY DON'T WE HAVE EVEN GREATER FAITH IN THE SON WHO MADE THE SUN AND ALL THE REST OF THE FIXED ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE?

OUR FAITH IS IN GOD. GENUINE FAITH IS BORN OUT OF A KNOWLEDGE OF THE WILL OF GOD AND EXISTS ONLY TO FULFILL THAT WILL. FAITH IS NOT A MEANS OF GETTING MAN'S WILL DONE IN HEAVEN; IT IS THE MEANS OF GETTING GOD'S WILL DONE ON EARTH. AFTER HEARING ME SPEAK ON FAITH, A YOUNG MAN CAME BY TO TALK ABOUT HIS PERSONAL LIFE. HE SAID TO ME, "I'VE BEEN TRYING TO LIVE BY FAITH FOR THREE YEARS, AND IT HAS BEEN ONE TRIAL AFTER ANOTHER." "FAITH IN WHAT?" I ASKED. HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO RESPOND. THIS YOUNG MAN WAS TRYING TO LIVE BY FAITH IN FAITH. BUT FAITH ITSELF IS NOT A VALID OBJECT. THE ONLY VALID OBJECT FOR FAITH IS GOD AND THE REVELATION WE HAVE OF HIM IN HIS WORD.

FAITH IS THE OPERATING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THE OBJECT. GOD MUST BE THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH.

OVERPOWERING THE CAPTORS

HOW CAN ANYONE ENTER THE STRONG MAN'S HOUSE AND CARRY OFF HIS PROPERTY, UNLESS HE FIRST BINDS THE STRONG MAN? (MATTHEW 12:29).

A PRIME TARGET FOR OUR AUTHORITATIVE PRAYER IS THE "STRONG MAN" MENTIONED IN MATTHEW 12:29. JESUS WAS SAYING THAT YOU CANNOT RESCUE PEOPLE FROM THE BONDS OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS OR DEMONIC INFLUENCE UNLESS YOU FIRST OVERPOWER THEIR CAPTORS. SATAN'S POWER IS ALREADY BROKEN, BUT HE WILL NOT LET GO OF ANYTHING HE THINKS HE CAN KEEP UNTIL WE EXERCISE THE AUTHORITY DELEGATED TO US BY CHRIST.

WHEN WE PRAY WE ARE NOT TRYING TO PERSUADE GOD TO JOIN US IN OUR SERVICE FOR HIM; PRAYER IS THE ACTIVITY OF JOINING GOD IN HIS MINISTRY. BY FAITH WE LAY HOLD OF THE PROPERTY IN SATAN'S CLUTCHES WHICH RIGHTFULLY BELONGS TO GOD, AND WE HOLD ON UNTIL SATAN TURNS LOOSE. HE WILL HOLD ON TO THESE PEOPLE UNTIL WE DEMAND THEIR RELEASE ON THE BASIS OF OUR AUTHORITY IN CHRIST. ONCE SATAN IS BOUND THROUGH PRAYER, HE MUST LET GO.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF OUR WORLD SHOULD HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT ON OUR EVANGELISTIC STRATEGY.

ALL TOO OFTEN WE PROCLAIM THE VIRTUES OF CHRISTIANITY TO UNBELIEVERS LIKE SOMEONE STANDING OUTSIDE A PRISON COMPOUND PROCLAIMING TO THE INMATES THE VIRTUES OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

BUT UNLESS SOMEONE OVERPOWERS THE PRISON GUARDS AND OPENS THE GATES, HOW CAN THE PRISONERS EXPERIENCE THE FREEDOM WE'RE TELLING THEM ABOUT? WE MUST LEARN TO BIND THE STRONG MAN BEFORE WE WILL BE ABLE TO RESCUE HIS PRISONERS.

THE ULTIMATE FAITH-OBJECT

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY, YES AND FOREVER (HEBREWS 13:8).

THE FACT THAT YOU CLAIM TO BELIEVE IS NOT THE ISSUE OF FAITH. IT'S WHAT YOU BELIEVE OR IN WHOM YOU BELIEVE THAT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT YOUR FAITH WILL BE REWARDED. EVERYBODY WALKS BY FAITH EVERY DAY. EVERY TIME YOU DRIVE ON THE HIGHWAY, YOU DO SO BY FAITH. ARE THE OBJECTS OF YOUR FAITH ON THE HIGHWAY RELIABLE? MOST OF THE TIME THEY ARE BECAUSE MOST DRIVERS DRIVE SAFELY. BUT YOU MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN AN ACCIDENT BECAUSE YOU PLACED YOUR FAITH IN ANOTHER DRIVER WHO PROVED TO BE UNTRUSTWORTHY.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE OBJECT OF YOUR FAITH FAILS YOU? YOU GIVE UP ON IT-MAYBE NOT IMMEDIATELY, BUT HOW MANY FAILURES WOULD YOU TOLERATE BEFORE SAYING NEVER AGAIN? ONCE FAITH IS DAMAGED OR LOST, IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO REGAIN. YOUR BELIEF ISN'T THE PROBLEM; IT'S THE OBJECT OF YOUR BELIEF THAT EITHER REWARDS OR DESTROYS YOUR FAITH. IF YOUR MARRIAGE PARTNER HAS BEEN UNFAITHFUL TO YOU, OR A FRIEND OR RELATIVE HAS HURT YOU BADLY, YOUR FAITH IN THAT PERSON IS WEAK BECAUSE HE OR SHE DID NOT LIVE UP TO YOUR TRUST. WHEN FAITH IN A PERSON IS SHATTERED, IT MAY TAKE MONTHS TO REBUILD IT.

SOME FAITH-OBJECTS, HOWEVER, ARE SOLID. YOU SET YOUR WATCH, PLAN YOUR CALENDAR, AND SCHEDULE YOUR DAY BELIEVING THAT THE EARTH WILL CONTINUE TO REVOLVE ON ITS AXIS AND ROTATE AROUND THE SUN AT ITS CURRENT SPEED. IF THE EARTH'S ORBIT SHIFTED JUST A FEW DEGREES, OUR LIVES WOULD BE TURNED TO CHAOS. BUT SO FAR THE LAWS GOVERNING THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE HAVE BEEN AMONG THE MOST TRUSTWORTHY FAITH-OBJECTS WE HAVE.

THE ULTIMATE FAITH-OBJECT, OF COURSE, IS NOT THE SUN, BUT THE SON. IT IS HIS IMMUTABILITY-THE FACT THAT HE NEVER CHANGES-THAT MAKES HIM EMINENTLY TRUSTWORTHY ("GOD IS NOT A MAN, THAT HE SHOULD LIE, NOR A SON OF MAN, THAT HE SHOULD CHANGE HIS MIND. DOES HE SPEAK AND THEN NOT ACT? DOES HE PROMISE AND NOT FULFIL?" NUMBERS 23:19. "I THE LORD DO NOT CHANGE. SO YOU, O DESCENDANTS OF JACOB, ARE NOT DESTROY." MALACHI 3:6). HE HAS NEVER FAILED TO BE AND DO ALL THAT HE SAID HE WOULD BE AND DO. HE IS ETERNALLY FAITHFUL.

SATAN'S THREEFOLD TEMPTATION

FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD, THE LUST OF THE FLESH AND THE LUST OF THE EYES AND THE BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE, IS NOT FROM THE FATHER, BUT IS FROM THE WORLD (1 JOHN 2:16).

YOU WILL BE BETTER PREPARED TO RESIST TEMPTATION IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT, ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, THERE ARE ONLY THREE CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH SATAN WILL ENTICE YOU TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. THEY ARE SUMMARIZED IN JOHN'S INSTRUCTIONS TO BELIEVERS CONCERNING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THIS WORLD: *"DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD, NOR THE THINGS IN THE WORLD. IF ANYONE LOVES THE WORLD, THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS NOT IN HIM. FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD, THE LUST OF THE FLESH AND THE LUST OF THE EYES AND THE BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE, IS NOT FROM THE FATHER, BUT IS FROM THE WORLD. AND THE WORLD IS PASSING AWAY, AND ALSO ITS LUSTS; BUT THE ONE WHO DOES THE WILL OF GOD ABIDES FOREVER"* (1 JOHN 2:15-17).

THE THREE CHANNELS OF TEMPTATION ARE THE LUST OF THE FLESH, THE LUST OF THE EYES, AND THE PRIDE OF LIFE. THE LUST OF THE FLESH PREYS ON OUR PHYSICAL APPETITES AND THEIR GRATIFICATION IN THIS WORLD. THE LUST OF THE EYES APPEALS TO SELF-INTEREST AND TESTS THE WORD OF GOD. THE PRIDE OF LIFE STRESSES SELF-PROMOTION AND SELF-EXALTATION. SATAN CONFRONTED BOTH THE FIRST ADAM AND THE LAST ADAM THROUGH EACH OF THESE THREE CHANNELS OF TEMPTATION.

NOTICE HOW SATAN USED PRECISELY THOSE THREE CHANNELS TO DECEIVE EVE: *"WHEN THE WOMAN SAW THAT THE TREE WAS GOOD FOR FOOD [LUST OF THE FLESH], AND THAT IT WAS A DELIGHT TO THE EYES [LUST OF THE EYES], AND THAT THE TREE WAS DESIRABLE TO MAKE ONE WISE [PRIDE OF LIFE], SHE TOOK FROM ITS FRUIT AND ATE"* (GENESIS 3:6). THE FIRST ADAM FAILED MISERABLY AND WE STILL SUFFER THE RESULTS OF HIS FAILURE. BUT THE LAST ADAM—JESUS CHRIST—MET SATAN'S THREEFOLD TEMPTATION HEAD-ON AND SUCCEEDED TRIUMPHANTLY. IN HIM WE HAVE THE RESOURCES AND THE POWER TO CONQUER EVERY TEMPTATION SATAN THROWS AT US.

THE LUST OF THE FLESH

SATAN FIRST APPROACHED EVE THROUGH THE CHANNEL OF THE LUST OF THE FLESH. HE PLANTED A DOUBT IN HER MIND ABOUT THE FRUIT OF THE TREE WHEN HE SAID: *"HAS GOD SAID, 'YOU SHALL NOT EAT FROM ANY TREE OF THE GARDEN?'"* (GENESIS 3:1). EVE ANSWERED, *"GOD HAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL NOT EAT FROM IT OR TOUCH IT'"* (VERSE 3). BUT SATAN HAD PIQUED HER APPETITE FOR THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT, AND SHE *"SAW THAT THE TREE WAS GOOD FOR FOOD"* (VERSE 6). YIELDING TO THE LUST OF THE FLESH CONTRIBUTED TO ADAM AND EVE'S DOWNFALL.

SATAN ALSO CHALLENGED JESUS THROUGH THE CHANNEL OF THE LUST OF THE FLESH. OUR LORD HAD BEEN FASTING FOR 40 DAYS WHEN SATAN TEMPTED HIM IN THE WILDERNESS AT THE POINT OF HIS APPARENT VULNERABILITY: *"IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, COMMAND THAT THESE STONES BECOME BREAD"* (MATTHEW 4:3). SATAN IS NOT OMNISCIENT, BUT HE'S NOT BLIND EITHER. HE LEARNED ABOUT JESUS' APPARENT VULNERABILITY TO PHYSICAL TEMPTATION BY WATCHING HIM GO WITHOUT FOOD FOR 40 DAYS. HE'S WATCHING YOU TOO, LOOKING FOR SOFT SPOTS OF VULNERABILITY IN YOUR APPETITES FOR FOOD, REST, COMFORT AND SEX. TEMPTATION IS GREATEST WHEN HUNGER, FATIGUE AND LONELINESS ARE ACUTE. THE TEMPTATION OF THE LUST OF THE FLESH IS DESIGNED TO DRAW US AWAY FROM THE WILL OF GOD TO SERVE THE FLESH (GALATIANS 5:16, 17).

WHEN SATAN TEMPTS YOU THROUGH THE CHANNEL OF THE LUST OF THE FLESH, HE WILL INVITE YOU TO FULFILL YOUR NEEDS IN WAYS THAT ARE OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARY OF GOD'S WILL. WHENEVER YOU FEEL ENTICED TO MEET A LEGITIMATE NEED BY ACTING INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD, YOU ARE BEING TEMPTED THROUGH THE LUST OF THE FLESH.

WHEN YOU RESIST THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE LUST OF THE FLESH, YOU ARE DECLARING YOUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD FOR YOUR NEEDS. AS SUCH YOU ARE REMAINING *"IN THE VINE,"* TAPPING INTO THE RESOURCES JESUS REFERRED TO IN JOHN 15:5. BUT WHEN YOU YIELD TO TEMPTATION IN THIS AREA, YOUR FRUITFULNESS AS A CHRISTIAN WILL SUFFER BECAUSE APART FROM CHRIST YOU CAN DO NOTHING.

THE LUST OF THE EYES

THE SECOND CHANNEL OF TEMPTATION THROUGH WHICH SATAN CAME TO ADAM AND EVE RELATED TO HIS LIE CONCERNING THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEYING GOD. GOD HAD SAID THAT DEATH WOULD ACCOMPANY DISOBEDIENCE, BUT SATAN SAID, *"YOU SURELY SHALL NOT DIE!"* (GENESIS 3:4). HE WAS APPEALING TO EVE'S SENSE OF SELF-PRESERVATION BY FALSELY ASSURING HER THAT GOD WAS WRONG ON THE ISSUE OF SIN'S CONSEQUENCES. "DON'T LISTEN TO HIM; DO WHAT'S RIGHT IN YOUR OWN EYES," HE URGED. THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT WAS A DELIGHT TO HER EYES (VERSE 6), SO SHE AND ADAM IGNORED GOD'S COMMAND IN ORDER TO DO WHAT APPEARED TO SERVE THEIR OWN BEST INTERESTS.

THE LUST OF THE EYES SUBTLY DRAWS US AWAY FROM THE WORD OF GOD AND EATS AWAY AT OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD. WE SEE WHAT THE WORLD HAS TO OFFER AND DESIRE IT ABOVE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE BEGIN TO PLACE MORE CREEDENCE IN OUR OWN PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE THAN IN GOD'S COMMANDS AND PROMISES. FUELED BY THE LUST FOR WHAT WE SEE, WE GRAB FOR ALL WE CAN GET, BELIEVING THAT WE NEED IT AND DECEIVED THAT GOD WANTS US TO HAVE IT. WRONGLY ASSUMING THAT GOD WILL WITHHOLD NOTHING GOOD FROM US, WE LUSTFULLY CLAIM PROSPERITY. INSTEAD OF TRUSTING GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY, WE ADOPT A *"PROVE IT TO ME"* ATTITUDE. THAT WAS THE ESSENCE OF SATAN'S SECOND TEMPTATION OF JESUS: *"IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, THROW YOURSELF DOWN [FROM THE PINNACLE OF THE TEMPLE]"* (MATTHEW 4:6). BUT JESUS WASN'T ABOUT TO PLAY SATAN'S *"SHOW ME"* GAME. HE REPLIED, *"IT IS WRITTEN, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST'"* (VERSE 7).

GOD IS UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO US; HE IS UNDER OBLIGATION ONLY TO HIMSELF. THERE IS NO WAY YOU CAN CLEVERLY WORD A PRAYER SO THAT GOD MUST RESPOND TO IT. THAT NOT ONLY DISTORTS THE MEANING OF PRAYER BUT PUTS US IN THE POSITION OF GOD. THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH IN THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD AND NOT DEMAND THAT GOD PROVE HIMSELF IN RESPONSE TO OUR WHIMS OR WISHES, NO MATTER HOW NOBLE THEY MAY BE. WE ARE THE ONES BEING TESTED.

THE PRIDE OF LIFE

THE THIRD CHANNEL OF TEMPTATION IS AT THE HEART OF THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT: THE TEMPTATION TO DIRECT OUR OWN DESTINY, TO RULE OUR OWN WORLD, TO BE OUR OWN GOD. SATAN TANTALIZED EVE CONCERNING THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT: *"THE DAY YOU EAT FROM IT YOUR EYES WILL BE OPENED, AND YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD, KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL"* (GEN. 3:5).

SATAN'S OFFER WAS AN EXAGGERATED APPEAL TO OUR GOD-INSTILLED PROPENSITY TO RULE. "DON'T BE SATISFIED RULING UNDER GOD," HE SEEMED TO SAY, "WHEN YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE LIKE GOD." EVE WAS CONVINCED THAT "THE TREE WAS DESIRABLE TO MAKE ONE WISE" (VERSE 6), SHE ATE.

SATAN'S PROMISE THAT THE COUPLE WOULD BECOME LIKE GOD WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A LIE. WHEN ADAM AND EVE YIELDED TO HIS TEMPTATION, THEY DIDN'T BECOME THE GODS OF THIS WORLD AS HE CLAIMED THEY WOULD. INSTEAD, THEY FELL FROM THEIR POSITION OF RULERSHIP WITH GOD, AND SATAN BECAME THE GOD OF THIS WORLD BY DEFAULT—EXACTLY AS HE HAD PLANNED. SATAN TRIED THE SAME PLOY WITH JESUS: *"ALL [THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD AND THEIR GLORY] WILL I GIVE YOU, IF YOU FALL DOWN AND WORSHIP ME"* (MATTHEW 4:9). WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, SATAN'S OFFER WAS PRETTY RIDICULOUS. WHY WOULD JESUS BE TEMPTED TO WORSHIP SATAN IN EXCHANGE FOR THE WORLD WHEN HE ALREADY OWNED THE UNIVERSE? SO HE REPLIED, *"BEGONE, SATAN! FOR IT IS WRITTEN, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY'"*

THE TEMPTATION OF THE PRIDE OF LIFE IS INTENDED TO STEER US AWAY FROM THE WORSHIP OF GOD AND DESTROY OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD BY URGING US TO BECOME OUR OWN GOD. WHENEVER YOU FEEL THAT YOU DON'T NEED GOD'S HELP OR DIRECTION, THAT YOU CAN HANDLE YOUR LIFE WITHOUT CONSULTING HIM, THAT YOU DON'T NEED TO BOW THE KNEE TO ANYONE, BEWARE: THAT'S THE PRIDE OF LIFE. WHENEVER YOU STOP WORSHIPPING AND SERVING GOD, YOU ARE IN REALITY WORSHIPPING AND SERVING SATAN. YOUR LIFE SHOULD BE CHARACTERIZED BY WORSHIPFUL HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD (1 PETER 5:5-11; JOHN 15:8-10).

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