

Christian Retirement

Part 52

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On the Three Enemies

Why are so many souls deceived and plunged into destruction? Because they will not think. Lack of thought is one of the fruitful sources of human misery. "My people do not consider." A thoughtless mind is one of the characteristics of that broad road which leads to destruction; while anxious inquiry, a solicitous concern, a serious consideration about eternal things, is the first step through grace, into that narrow way which leads unto life eternal. Give me, blessed Savior, a thoughtful, serious, reflecting mind; a deep sight into myself; a watchful eye over my spiritual enemies; an unshaken confidence in you.

From the word of God, and my own experience, I find that there are three powerful enemies, which are incessantly laboring to destroy my soul.

The first is THE WORLD. Being rescued from its snares, through the mighty power of God, it still seeks to effect my ruin: 1. By its smiles—hoping thereby to win me back again, and allure my poor, vain heart by its soft, seductive influence. This is a most dangerous temptation, and few withstand its force. 2. By its frowns—thinking thereby to terrify my soul, and cause me to renounce the faith of Jesus, rather than suffer affliction with the people of God for a season. Lord, strengthen my faith, and arm me for the combat. 3. By placing before my eyes its riches, honors, and pleasures—to captivate my affections, and wean me from the unseen glories of a future world. Fatal temptation! "Demas has forsaken me," said Paul, "having loved this present era world." To withdraw the affections from the things of time; to sit loosely even to lawful enjoyments; and to wait with anxious desire for the signal of departure to a better world; is what unassisted nature can never perform: yet genuine religion consists in this happy state of mind. Lord, help me. Without you, I can do nothing; but, Oh! glorious triumph, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The second enemy, who labors to oppose my progress to the realms of bliss, is THE FLESH; dangerous enemy indeed, because never separated from me. Wherever I go, I carry this enemy in my bosom. Lord, save me from this sinful man, myself! The flesh harasses my soul: 1. By exciting evil affections and lusts, and stimulating to wicked and unlawful actions. 2. By resisting the good motions

of the Spirit; stifling its convictions, and craving a little more indulgence on the lap of sinful pleasure. 3. By laboring to blind my understanding by false reasoning, and thereby aiding the tempter in his work of destruction. Thus inbred sin is always at work. I am only safe while vigilant and constant at a throne of grace.

The third enemy, by whose subtlety and malice man became a child of misery, is THE DEVIL. This great adversary of the human race, as well as the world and the flesh, has many devices and stratagems to deceive and to destroy. May I never forget my helplessness and danger; but ever look to Him who fought this warrior in my nature, and overcame him by his own most precious death upon the cross.

The devil harasses my soul: 1. By injecting evil thoughts; those firebrands of hell, which fill the mind with anguish, and almost drive the trembling sinner to despair. The feeble-minded and the low-spirited are exposed to this artillery of Satan; from which even the strongest and most joyous believer is not wholly exempted. When the enemy comes in like a flood, Oh blessed Spirit, lift up a standard against him. When the overflowings of ungodliness make me afraid, then arise, Oh! mighty conqueror of death and hell; so shall your enemies be scattered; then shall those who hate you flee before you! 2. The devil tempts me to ruin by presenting the bait of sin under false names and alluring colors. How many are destroyed by this temptation! The object of Satan is to represent the religion of Jesus as gloomy, unsocial, and forbidding; and the pleasures of the world as smiling, sociable, and enchanting. Lord, make me watchful. "In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Enable me to examine every thing by the light of truth: to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good. 3. He seeks my destruction by stirring up the wicked to persecute my soul; and by spreading stumbling-blocks to impede my progress towards the heavenly Canaan. These are but a small part of his devices, of which the believer is not ignorant. We are in an enemy's country. This is the field of battle. Here we must fight; but, if we endure faithful unto the end, we shall triumphantly join in the conqueror's song.

My prayer must daily be, that I may never be allowed to indulge a thought, which I would not dare to express; or do an action in secret, which I should blush to have known.

I do not expect, while in this state of mortality, to be free from every sinful thought, or effectually to prevent their entrance into the mind. This is the perfection of heaven. Yet I must labor after this blessedness by faith and prayer, or I am only a hypocrite and self-deceiver.

The ready access which Satan has to the imaginative powers of the soul, and the quickness with which he can dart his poisonous suggestions into the heart, are most astonishing. No season is too sacred to prevent his bold intrusion. The house of God and the table of the Lord do not afford a sanctuary from this enemy. Judas stands on record as an awful witness to this truth.

The Christian's private retirement is often greatly disturbed by this restless invader, who tempted the holy Jesus in the desert. He raises visionary schemes of profit or pleasure, to amuse the fancy or engage the passions. No art or stratagem is left untried, to tempt the harassed soul to forego its duties, or meditate on any thing rather than Christ, and holiness, and heaven.

Oh! how precious at such a season are prayer and the word of God! The sword of the Spirit and all-prayer are the weapons which Satan cannot long withstand, when wielded by the arm of faith. "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you," is written for the encouragement of tempted pilgrims.

But who can prevent the injections of Satan? I might as soon attempt to check the whirlwind in its course, or stop the flowing tide. Yet I may and must resist them by faith and prayer, or I shall perish by them. All-sufficient help is offered. Jesus has said, "My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness." The promise is, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." I must daily seek this promised aid by humble, persevering prayer. Then, as surely as the promise stands recorded in the Bible, so surely shall I come off more than conqueror through the blood of the Lamb.

This is not, however, the work of an hour. The believer's warfare ends only with his life. He puts off his earthly tabernacle and his earthly troubles together. Oh my soul! take encouragement from that consoling question which was put to doubting Sarah: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Almighty Savior! when sin is working within me, and my soul is bowed down with sorrow; when Satan buffets me with his horrid assaults, and all seems darkness and despair; when unbelief would tempt me to give up all for lost: then may I hear you speak in cheering accents to my soul, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Oh! let me never forget this animating question, which puts to flight a host of unbelieving fears. May I daily live upon your grace, and rest on nothing, blessed Lord, but you.

When I contemplate myself, what do I behold? A polluted nature; a deceitful heart; a body every moment tending to decay; a beclouded understanding; a depraved will; affections in disorder; a memory retaining things forbidden; a creature, in short, born in sin; a child of wrath; an heir of hell. Awful as this portrait is, and humbling to the pride of carnal man, yet it gives but a faint representation of the original.

And can such a hateful creature enter into heaven? Impossible! I must be born again. But can the Lord renew so vile a being, and cause the graces of his Spirit to abound in such a heart as mine?

Hear, Oh! my soul, the words of your Savior which he spoke to Sarah, as the ANGEL OF THE COVENANT: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Lord, I believe—help my unbelief. I believe you can in a moment raise me from a death in sin to a life of righteousness; and shall I doubt your willingness? You came to call sinners to repentance. You came to seek and to save that which was lost. Thousands in every age, who have felt the power of your regenerating grace, can witness to this delightful truth, that nothing is too hard for you.

Oh! heavenly Father; bestow on me, the vilest, the most unworthy of your creatures, a look, a smile of love, for his dear sake in whom my soul delights, even Jesus, the sinner's friend.

You are almighty; nothing is too hard for you. Let not unbelief; for one moment, stop the current of your grace; but cause your saving mercy to flow onward in my soul, until unbelief and pride, and every sin, shall be forever lost beneath the powerful stream. Then shall I be able to tell some fearful, doubting saint, what you have done for my soul, and to the latest moment of my life proclaim, with heartfelt joy, that nothing is too hard for you.

I will plead your promise, Lord,
I will trust your faithful word;
Since this precious truth I see,
"As your days, your strength shall be"

Often I feel an evil heart,
Prone to wander and depart;
But your word still speaks to me,
"As your days, your strength shall be"

Satan, with his crafty wile,
Seeks to fill my heart with guile;
Yet the promise says to me,
"As your days, your strength shall be"

In whatever strait I come,
While I journey to my home,
This shall be my stay and plea:
"As your days, your strength shall be."

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