

630 How Can We Win over Sin?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

The devil tempts all of us and sometimes gets the upper hand. But God gives us the strength and the ability to overcome our temptations and sins. How can we win over sin? From the time we are little, we face temptation. We smell momma's cookies as they go into the cookie jar, but we can't have one now. We want one so bad. Momma leaves the kitchen, and we're all alone. Will we put our hand in the cookie jar to get a forbidden cookie? Our hearts tell us all the reasons why we want that cookie, but our consciences tell us that momma said no. The decision we make at that point will affect decisions we make throughout life. If we give in and take a cookie, it will be easier the next time a temptation comes along. If we learn early to say no, we will begin building character. How can we win over our desires and temptations?

Temptations! They come to us everyday. There is no escaping them. But just because we are tempted does not mean we have to yield to that temptation and sin against God. Paul said in Ephesians 6:10-13, "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." It's shocking to realize how many folks do not know that they are in a personal battle with the devil. Many people think that sin is no big deal and we should not worry about living holy lives. They don't realize we are in a war that is bigger than for land or money; it is a war for our souls and for the souls of those whom we love.

If we do not know we are in this fight, we will surely lose. Our opponent, the devil is wily and strong and quite capable of defeating anyone of us on our own. He has been fighting this battle for a long time and knows all of the weaknesses of human beings. If we are not prepared for this battle, we can be assured that we will lose, because the devil is well-prepared and well-armed for a fight. This battle is a personal battle, and we can't pass the fight onto someone else. Each of us must stand on our own. Being prepared for the battle has nothing to do with physical size or physical strength. It has everything to do with spiritual strength. We wrestle with the devil not in a ring somewhere but in our hearts and minds. We don't always know when or where temptation will strike us; this is why we have to be prepared at all times for the fight. We must take up the armor of God, or we will surely lose. We need God's strength and protection to be able to win this battle. If we are not equipped, we won't have the weapons we need to fight off the devil. If we are well-prepared and well-equipped, there is one more thing we must do. We must fight with all our strength and resolve. When you fight the devil, you are not fighting a wimp. You must give it your all to be able to stand on the evil day of your testing. In ancient battles only the winner was standing; his opponent was dead. You are fighting for your soul and perhaps for the souls of those whom you love. If you lose, it will be easier for them to fall. This is why none of us can take the battle against sin lightly. In the day of battle, Roman soldiers were to stand their ground, not retreat. As long as they stood together on a flat, open field and did not break ranks, their legions were considered virtually invincible.

Paul describes our armor in the following verses (Eph. 6:14-20): "Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." What are the pieces of our armor? They are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer. These things may seem trivial, but God knows how to equip his people for the battle.

Truth is like a belt around our waist. Before a Roman soldier put on his armor, he put a belt **around his waist**. This held his garments together and served as a place on which to hang his armor. The "belt" or "girdle" refers to the leather apron beneath the armor or to the metal belt protecting the lower abdomen. **The belt of truth** refers not to the facts of the gospel but to subjective truth, a believer's integrity and faithfulness. As a soldier's belt or sash gave ease and freedom of movement, so truth gives freedom with self, others, and God. God expects His people to be honest with Him and with themselves. God desires truth in one's innermost being (Psalm 51:6). It is easy for people to deceive themselves into thinking they can be around sin or participate in sin and not be hurt by it. Paul said 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals." If you let sin get into your life, even a little bit, it will try to make a home there and ruin your thinking and your character. Being honest with ourselves about sin helps us to evaluate it rightly. We can't ever afford to flirt with it; it will come back to hurt us. The biggest lie Satan ever told was, you can sin and not have any consequences. He told Eve that she wouldn't die if she ate the fruit. He is still telling that same old lie, and people are foolishly believing it.

Righteousness is like a breastplate. The "breastplate" normally consisted of leather overlaid with metal, and it protected the chest in battle. It was used only in battle, not for normal wear. Roman soldiers were to face forward in battle, side by side, so the armor needed to protect only their front. There is nothing more reassuring than knowing we are right with the living God. As a soldier's breastplate protected his chest from an enemy's attacks, so sanctifying ourselves, righteous living guards a believer's heart against the assaults of the devil. Paul said in Romans 6:13, "and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God." When we think of our bodies as God's servants not the devil's, it makes us a differences in the choices we make. Paul urged the Romans in chapter 12:1-2, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Our bodies indeed are the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19) and belong to God. They are not ours to use as we want. When we live righteous, consecrated lives, separated from sin, we don't find ourselves drawn to the things that will cost us our souls.

The Gospel of Peace gives us a foundation for our feet. Soldiers needed to wear sandals or boots (technically the Roman *caliga*, a half boot) so they could advance toward the enemy undistracted about what they might step on; this gear was essential to their "preparation" for battle. Paul takes the

image especially from the herald of Isaiah who announces good news: sharing the message of Christ advances God's army against the enemy's position. Isaiah 52:7 says, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Our message is one of peace, of confidence in God, of forgiveness and a right relationship. When God reigns in our lives, we have good news—a gospel of peace in our lives. Faith is like a shield. Roman soldiers were equipped with large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high, the fronts of which were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wetted to quench any fiery darts launched against them. After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows. Because the Greek and Roman god of passion (called Eros and Cupid, respectively) was said to strike with flaming arrows, some of Paul's readers may have thought specifically of the temptation of lust in this verse, although it may refer to all kinds of challenges the world brings to us. Satan is vicious, but faith can protect us from those sudden temptations.

Salvation is a helmet to protect our heads. The cross of Jesus ought to make a difference in our lives. When the blood of Jesus forgives our sins, it ought to make us want to stay out of sin. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:1-3, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries." In salvation we are cleansed from our past sins and given a new start free from the hold that sin has over us. That time is past. We are new people in Christ. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." When we come into Christ, we leave the world behind. Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." In Christ we are crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to us. Some Christians frankly don't believe that. They claim to be Christians but walk like the world walks. Until a person makes a clean break with the world, sin will always be a problem.

Jesus taught in Matthew 5:27-30, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell." Now Jesus is not interested in his people being crippled and blind physically. He is interested that they cease from sin. Sometimes that takes radical action. It means getting rid of all the things that offend and tempt. My friend, male or female, if you have a problem looking at someone to lust after them, then it's time to stop. Stop attending movies that show unclothed people. When an R-rated movie comes on television, turn to something else.

The word of God is our sword. Three times in Matthew chapter 4 Jesus faced down the temptations of the devil by quoting Scripture. Knowing the word of God, treasuring it up in our hearts, may be the most powerful thing we can do to defeat the devil. God's word has a power to protect us and to guide us, so we know the right thing to do. David said in Psalm 119:11, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." There is a power in the word of God to help us win the battle of our hearts to do right rather than wrong. We must let that word pierce us to convict us and help us do what we ought to do not what we wish to do.

Last, there is the power of prayer. Prayer works because God works. We pray for strength, and God gives it. We pray for deliverance from evil, and God answers. Prayer puts us in touch with God, who is faithful to us. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." We need to believe in this promise. We cannot, we must not, give up in our fight to be God's holy and pure children. We must fight for our souls and the souls of those whom we love.

You can win in your fight with the devil. You can overcome sin. Others have faced the same struggles and trials and have come out victorious. You can too! Peter said in 1 Peter 5:8-10, "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. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." Each of us will face a time of test, but if we stand firm with God, God will see us through and will strengthen and confirm us. We must draw ever closer to God. Perhaps you've never thought about the battle for your soul. You aren't going to church, have never become a Christian, and haven't thought about what will happen to you once this life is over. Perhaps today you'll begin thinking. Heaven and hell are real places, and you will be assigned once place or the other for an eternity. The real issue is this: is God in your life giving you a victory over sin, or has sin overcome you? Become a Christian today by believing that Jesus is the Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing Jesus before others, and by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. There is no better day than today to obey the gospel. It may be that as a Christian, you've been losing this battle. Perhaps you've forgotten who your Father in Heaven is and have given yourself to the world. Why not come back home to the Lord today? Today is all you have. Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is only a promise. Act today.

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