

## Resisting Satan - part 1

**Reading: 1 Peter 5:8-9** “....Resist him, steadfast in the faith....”

### **Introduction:**

Christians would have to be the most privileged people in the whole world. Whatever our physical circumstances in life, we have something that is to be treasured above all else – eternal life (**Romans 6:23b**). Having previously been alienated from God, and facing eternal condemnation because of our sins, we are now God’s own special people (**Romans 8:1; 1 Peter 2:9**). We have been saved from a corrupt world by the blood of Jesus (**1 Peter 1:18-19; 2 Peter 1:4**). We are now God’s children (**Romans 8:16**), and enjoy all the spiritual benefits and blessings that are to be found in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3-12**).

However, for now, we still live in a world with all its temptations and desires. We are still subject to “...*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*....”<sup>1</sup> (**1 John 2:16**). Each of us will still to some extent be “...*drawn away by his (or her) own desires and enticed....*” (**James 1:14**). And Satan is right there ready to help you go down that track. He is just looking for the opportunity to help you to go astray and sin (**1 Peter 5:8**).

The exhortation from the reading (for this lesson) is that we are to “...*resist him (i.e. the Devil), (standing) steadfast in the faith....*”. The words of this verse imply that;

- there will be an ongoing contest between us and Satan, hence the need to “*resist*”, and,
- it will be a drawn-out battle, requiring us to remain “*steadfast in the faith*”.
  - we may wrestle with some temptations over a long period of time.

But how are we to go about doing that? How can we fend off Satan, who has centuries of experience in deceiving people - since the early days of creation (**Genesis 3:1-6; John 8:44**)? Over the course of two lessons, we will consider what the scriptures have to say about;

- the times when Satan will strike (so that we can be alert), and,
- what we need to do to resist him.

## **LESSON**

### **1) Satan will tempt everyone**

From our reading (**1 Peter 5:8**) we learn that Satan is prowling around just looking for an opportunity<sup>2</sup> to catch us. It doesn’t matter who you are, Satan has you in his sights;

- He targeted the first woman, Eve (**Genesis 3:1-6**).
- He targeted David (**1 Chronicles 21:1**), a “*man after His (i.e. God’s) own heart*” (**1 Samuel 13:14; 16:7,13**).

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Refer also to a related lesson, “Satan and his subtle devices”, by Steve Keddie, August, 2010

<sup>1</sup> All Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

<sup>2</sup> When Satan was unsuccessful in tempting Jesus in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-10; Luke 4:1-12**), he left Him until a more “*opportune time*” (**Luke 4:13**), Consider **Hebrews 4:15**. Jesus obviously faced more temptations than just those mentioned in **Luke 4:1-12**.

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- He targeted Jesus (**Luke 4:1-12**), the Son of God (**Matthew 16:16**).
- He targeted those who were with Jesus – Peter and Judas (**Matthew 16:23; John 13:27**).
- He targeted those in the early church – Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:3**).
- And given that we are exhorted to “...*resist him*...” (**1 Peter 5:9**), we can be certain that he will have a go at us as well.

But when is the most likely time that he will strike? *Is there a “most likely time”?* Are there some times when we need to be more alert than others?

Putting **1 Peter 5:8** and **Luke 4:13** together, it seems that Satan is not necessarily trying to deceive us every single minute of every day. Rather, he waits for an opportunity when he feels that he will have the most chance of success; when we are vulnerable; when our guard is down. Some (but certainly not all) of those occasions will be discussed in the rest of this lesson.

### **2) He will tempt us when we are frustrated or dis-satisfied with things**

There are times in our lives when we become frustrated, disappointed, or dis-satisfied with the way things are going. Our thoughts can turn from being centred on those “...*things* (which are) *above*...” (**Colossians 3:2a**), to be centred on ourselves. Satan will use these times to weaken our resolve to be faithful to God. It is during these sort of times that we can be tempted to “justify” our sins using worldly logic.

- we can submit to the temptations of the world in times of depression because we think that it will make us feel better<sup>3</sup>; that it will cheer us up; that it will help us get over our “slump”.
- when dis-satisfied with life, or when things don’t seem to be going our way at all, we can start to wonder whether the sacrifices that are required in order to live a faithful life are worth it, and we start to justify not exercising self-control<sup>4</sup> by thinking, “*why should I ?*”.

These emotions are not new. The first person recorded as being born on this earth, Cain, was discouraged and angry when his sacrifices to God were not being accepted (**Genesis 4:1, 5**). This discouragement made him vulnerable to temptation. In verse **7** we read that “...*sin lay at the door*...”, *i.e.* committing sin was not far away. But sin, while close at hand, was not inevitable. God had said at the start of that verse, “*If you do well, will you not be accepted?...*”. Cain could have humbly accepted God’s advice and lived his life and offered his sacrifices in the way that God wanted him to. But rather than change his ways and resist the temptation to strike out, he vented his anger<sup>5</sup> on his brother Abel, and killed him (vs.**8**).

**Point:** Satan can use times of anger, disappointment and frustration to tempt us into following the ways of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Any “enjoyment” that we may get from sinning is only temporary - **Hebrews 11:25**.

<sup>4</sup> We are commanded to exercise self-control – **Galatians 5:22-25; 2 Peter 1:5-6**.

<sup>5</sup> **James 1:20** “...*for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*...”

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### 3) He will tempt us when personal relationships are not the best

When someone who is our friend, or someone we like, do things that offend us or upset us, we quite often either ignore it or don't let it bother us for too long. But it can easily be a different story when it involves someone that we don't particularly like. It is not unusual for us to hold grudges or to harbour unkind thoughts towards them. And if we subsequently do something against them, we may try and justify it by saying, "*Well, they deserve it*", or, "*They did it to me first*".

But such is not the attitude that God requires of us (**Romans 12:19-21**). When we look for ways or come up with excuses to "justify" our sins against others, we have let ourselves fall into Satan's grasp. We are no longer walking according to God's Word (**Psalm 119:105; Ephesians 5:8**).

Also, Satan can also take advantage of us when there are signs of discord amongst brethren, or when sin amongst us remains unchecked. The church at Corinth was plagued by division (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13**), a situation that Paul described as being "*carnal*" (**1 Cor. 3:3-4**), *i.e.* worldly (**Romans 8:6-7**).

To their credit, after being rebuked<sup>6</sup> by Paul, they finally took action against the man who had been living in a sinful relationship (**1 Corinthians 5:1-7; 2 Corinthians 2:6**). Eventually, the person concerned repented and became very remorseful. The church was now exhorted by Paul to forgive him and to reaffirm their love for him, "...lest Satan should take advantage of us....." (**2 Corinthians 2:6-11**).

But how could Satan "*...take advantage of us...*"? Well, we read in **2 Corinthians 2: 7** that the person could be "*...swallowed up with too much sorrow...*", *i.e.* he could become so despondent that he gives up being a Christian. Potentially, also, the congregation could harbour an un-loving and un-forgiving attitude towards him because of the nature of his sin (vs.**7-8**). In other words, Satan could use the situation to promote unwholesome attitudes and cause people to be lost.

**Point:** When relationships between people are not as they should be, Satan can use this to foster unwholesome attitudes and actions.

### 4) He will tempt us when things are going well

It would be easy to think that Satan only approaches us when we are feeling "down", or weak. But such is not the case.

In the latter chapters of **1 Chronicles**, we read about the various wars and battles that went on between Israel and her enemies. Through them all, Israel was victorious. Then in **1 Chronicles 21:1** we read, "*Now Satan<sup>7</sup> stood up*

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<sup>6</sup> The context suggests that the church was rebuked because they had failed to take action to correct the situation.

<sup>7</sup> The account in **2 Samuel 24:1** states that, '*...He (the Lord) moved David...*'. Up front, this appears to be a contradiction with **1 Chronicles 21:1** as to who "moved" David. However, we need to remember that God does not tempt anyone (**James 1:13**). At the time, God was angry with Israel (**2 Samuel 24:1a**), and it may be that He allowed Satan to "move" David to number the people as a means to fulfilling His will to punish Israel. (*i.e.* the Lord "moved" David through the use of Satan, in much the same way as God allowed evil men to crucify Jesus in order to fulfil His Will that Jesus be the sacrifice for our sins.) In spite of the temptation by Satan, David still had the choice to resist it.

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*against Israel, and moved David to number Israel....*”. David wanted to know how big the nation was, and from what we see in verse 5, it would appear that the number of men who could “*draw the sword*”<sup>8</sup> was an important part of this counting. While the passage is not 100% clear or explicit about David’s motives, the context would suggest that pride may well have been involved - a bit like a rich man wanting to count all of his money to see how much he has.

Despite the fact that even Joab<sup>9</sup> could see that this census was the wrong thing to do (vs.3), the counting went ahead. But once it was completed, God struck Israel, and David acknowledged his sin (**1 Chronicles 21:7-8**).

**Point:** When things are going well for us, when everything seems to be OK, we can easily “drop our guard” and allow Satan the opportunity to strike (**1 Corinthians 10:12**).

### 5) He will tempt us when we are idle, bored.

The Lord expects us to be active people, as much as we are able<sup>10</sup>. The parable of the talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**) is a lesson about the need for us to use whatever talents we have in productive service. It doesn’t matter whether we are working in the home, or in the church, or in the secular world. God doesn’t want our lives to be characterised by idleness (**1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12**). When He first created man, God gave him a job to do - tending to the garden of Eden (**Genesis 2:8, 15**). Christians are to be engaged in good works whenever the opportunity presents itself (**Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:10**). There will always be things that need to be done (**John 12:8a**), and each one needs to do their share (**Ephesians 4:16**).

It seems that idleness provides an opportunity for the devil (**1 Timothy 5:13-14**). It is not sufficient for the Christian to just simply stop doing the things that are wrong. Yes, the Christian is to remove worldliness from his or her life (**Romans 12:1-2**). However, if that worldliness is not replaced by godliness (**1 Timothy 6:11**)<sup>11</sup>, then we leave ourselves exposed again to worldliness and the influence of Satan. In **Matthew 12:43-45**, Jesus illustrates the point by teaching about an unclean spirit that leaves a man. But when the spirit finds nowhere else to go and returns, he finds his “old home” swept, clean, and empty. He therefore goes and invites other unclean spirits to dwell with him in his old home. The point is this: If the worldliness in our lives is not replaced by godliness and righteousness, then worldliness will return, and be worse than it was before.

There is a quote from the scientific world that says that “nature abhors a vacuum”. And so it is with our hearts. Our hearts will dwell on something, and whatever it dwells on, that is what we are.

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<sup>8</sup> *i.e.* The number of men who could be called upon to defend the nation against its enemies.

<sup>9</sup> Joab was the commander of the army (**2 Samuel 24:2; 1 Chronicles 20:1**). However, he was not the most righteous of men (**2 Samuel 3:22-30; 18:9-15; 20:8-10**).

<sup>10</sup> It is acknowledged that sometimes handicaps, sickness, old age, lack of opportunities, *etc.*, can have a limiting effect on how active we can be. It is also acknowledged that there are times when periods of rest are also beneficial (**Mark 6:31**).

<sup>11</sup> Consider the “*put off....put on*” statements in **Ephesians 4:22-24** and **Colossians 3:5-16**.

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**Proverbs 4:23.** “...for out of it springs the issues of life...”

The mind that is not set on pursuing the things above is destined to follow the ways of this earth (**Romans 8:5-6; Colossians 3:1-2**). When it comes to idleness, it is interesting to note what the prophet Ezekiel said about Sodom, that city condemned for its sinfulness (**Genesis 18:20**) – he said it had an “...abundance of idleness...” (**Ezekiel 16:49**).

**Point:** Those who are idle provide fertile ground for Satan.

### **Conclusion:**

Satan will use the good times and the bad times to catch us out. He will use the times when we are discouraged. He will use the times when there is discord among brethren. And he will use the times when we are idle. There is never a time to be complacent. We are exhorted from the scriptures to “...watch...” (**Acts 20:31**), to “..be sober....vigilant...” (**2 Peter 5:8**), to be “...careful...” (**Titus 3:8**), and to be “...diligent...” (**2 Peter 1:5, 10**).

By understanding the times when Satan is likely to strike, we are “fore warned”, so that we can be “fore armed”.

In the second lesson on this topic, we will look at what the scriptures have to say about how we can overcome temptation and fight off Satan.