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The Good Fight

Some battles in life are fought and instantly won; passing tests, playing games, solving a puzzle in the newspaper, or winning at a sporting event. We preoccupy ourselves with these “battles” because they give us instantaneous gratification and bring us a measure of pleasure and self-assurance.

Some battles are fought for a while and won; graduating from high school or college, getting a promotion at work, achieving “retirement.” We can see the need for fighting these kinds of battles because there is a significant achievement to be won at the end and once we have achieved that level, we can move on to other things, having won the battle.

There are other battles, however, that are ongoing and we will never, in this life, completely win until we conquer them in death. These battles are constant and daily efforts with which we must struggle on a regular basis. This is a hard thing for our society to accept who are accustomed to complex crimes being solved in a one hour TV program, sporting events ending in less than two hours, and conquering the sudoku in 30 minutes. This kind of battle is only won in the continued fighting of it; it isn't a battle that is won, never to be fought again.

It is becoming quite evident to me, that my success in weight loss is only as good as my desire to maintain that success. Months ago, I spoke with another gentleman about this and he related to me how it was a regular struggle to eat right, exercise and keep the weight off. He then said, “But it's a good fight, so I guess I'll keep on doing it.” Losing weight and keeping the weight off isn't one of those battles that are won, never to be fought again. It is a constant and daily effort.

Similarly, in my police training this past fall one thing that I learned is that the law will eventually catch up to the criminal. Police activity is a constant and ongoing battle, one that never stops. It also isn't one of those battles won, never to be fought again. It is a constant and daily effort.

We need to realize that living the Christian life is the same kind of battle. If we realize and accept this, I believe we will have a great weight lifted from our shoulders. The person who is constantly telling himself, “I've got to win today!” will soon find himself hopelessly burned out with trying to achieve this task. Why? Because living the Christian life is only something that is won while we continue the struggle. Paul told Timothy, “Fight the good fight of the faith?” (1 Timothy 6:12) and wage the good battle (1 Timothy 1:18). It was a battle that Paul was only expecting Timothy to win by continuing to fight it.

Let us recognize that today we fight the battle and that our victory is in our faith on a daily basis (1 John 5:4) and through this, we will overcome, not in this life, but, in the next. For today, however, if I have struggled, then I have won.

Kevin Cauley Kensington Woods Church of Christ Hattiesburg, MS.

Happier Than Satan

Eric Welch

Do you remember the GEICO commercial with Dikembe Mutombo, former NBA player for the Houston Rockets? He is one of the greatest shot blockers and defensive players of all time. The commercial depicts Mutombo blocking shots from people who are tossing items into a trashcan, clothes into a laundry basket, change at the toll booth and a cereal box into a grocery cart. Each time he smiles, waves his index finger and says, “Not today” or “no, no” He then runs off laughing. The point of the commercial is that when you save money switching to insurance, you can be happier than Dikembe Mutombo blocking a shot.

Doesn't this funny commercial illustrate the serious work of Satan? Satan could not be happier than when he causes God's children to miss their target. That's what sin is, missing the target, falling short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

One way in which Satan blocks shots is when he stirs up trouble in a marriage. For example, 1 Peter 3.7 reads *Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

A husband who does not treat his wife with understanding can hinder his prayers. For example, the wife wants to talk to her husband about a problem with a friend. She hopes that he will listen. Instead, being the repairman of the family, he wants to fix the problem and begins offering solutions. He doesn't listen to her. You cannot repair feelings like you would a leaky faucet. She does not necessarily want a problem fixed or feel "repaired." She just wants her husband to understand. What can make a husband happier than Satan blocking "shots?" One who lives with his wife in an understanding way, showing her honor by listening to her.

Happier Than Satan (2)

Eric Welch

In the last article, I noted the insurance commercial in which Dikembe Mutombo, a former NBA basketball player, appears in various places blocking items that people toss into containers. He runs off laughing. The conclusion is that when you save money by switching to that insurance, you can be happier than Dikembe Mutombo blocking a shot. Quite funny. Satan likes to block shots too. He wants the disciples of Jesus to miss the target of giving glory to God in their life through sin (Romans 3:23).

One way Satan blocks shots is how husbands and wives relate to each other. The apostle Paul said, ...*let each one of you love his wife as himself.* A wife does not feel loved by her husband if he is inconsiderate towards her (1 Peter 3:7). AS a result his prayers are hindered (1 Peter 3:7). To feel loved is a wife's greatest need.

Paul continues, *and let the wife see that she respects her husband* (Ephesians 5:33). A wife disrespects her husband when she withholds physical intimacy from him for any reason. By doing so, she can actually contribute to the temptation for him to look elsewhere (1 Corinthians 7:1-7). If the wife is constantly questioning his decisions or his ability to provide for or to protect his family, he feels disrespected. Even the manner in which she communicates with her husband can show lack of respects for him. Nagging, criticizing or putting him down in front of others are two of the worst ways a man feels disrespected by his wife. The most important need for this husband is respect.

A great book on this subject is *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerich. According to Eggerich, when the husband feels disrespected, he might respond by withhold affection, which in turn will cause her to disrespect her husband even more. It can be a vicious, crazy cycle. Satan couldn't be happier when that happens. When Satan blocks our shots of living out our relationships with others for Christ, we must strengthen our defense and resist him (James 4:7) and never give him the opportunity to work against us.

What If ... ?

I am familiar with a situation wherein a young female college student became pregnant out of wedlock. This young Christian and her parents experienced a range of emotions unlike any others in their lifetime. It has now been more than twenty years since those circumstances and, in retrospect there are some things to be learned. I have not used personal names for obvious reasons but can assure you the story is true.

The father of the yet to be born child proved by his actions (and in-actions) to be irresponsible and not a viable candidate for participation in the decision-making process. He was a baptized person who knew little about being a Christian. Thus the discussions relative to so many things fell on the mom-to-be and her parents. The whole gamut of possible actions was discussed. Advice was sought and received from friends in whom the perspective mom and her parents had confidence. Unsolicited sources from the worldly abounded each with their own "fix-it" program.

After all the thought, prayers and careful consideration a decision was made to make the child available for adoption. A brother-in-Christ who has experience in such things was contacted for guidance. The only stipulation from the mom was that the parents be faithful Christians. It wasn't too long before the prospective parents were found and all the arrangements (and there were many) were made. The baby was given to the new parents at the hospital midst many tears, doubts and hopes.

Life, as it often does, went on. The family who adopted the child raised their daughter as faithful Christian parents do. The birth-mom recovered, repented and, with God's help, went on living a life that would include a husband and children. All concerned with the situation were, and are, faithful to the Lord.

These kinds of experiences leave questions in the minds of the major players. The adopted child wonders about her birth mother and wants information. There is a void. The birth mom wonders about her child and wants information. There is a void. The grandparents wonder about their grandchild and want information. There is a void. Sons and daughters of the birth mom want to know about their sister. There is a void. All this and more are consequences of things done before. Some are consequences felt by the direct participants, some by those who came along later.

Many times when major decisions are made like described above one does not have opportunity to validate. The questions go with us to the grave. The letter below is important to those who wonder if the right decision was made. It is a letter from the adopted girl to the birth mom.

".. there are so many more emotions that are coursing through my heart than what I expected if I ever found you. I'm thrilled you wanted to find me, because I was afraid if I did find you, you wouldn't want anything to do with me, and I wasn't sure if I could deal with that. So, yeah, you and I both get the answers we've been looking for. (mom's name) I want to be upfront that I have a family and mom and dad that love me and I'm not looking for another family. However, I have a thousand questions and will be happy to answer yours. Beyond that we'll just have to take it as it comes, but I repeat I'm not looking for another mother. My mom is a wonderful woman, as I'm sure you are, and there is no replacement for her. With that said, "Hi!" I sit here with a smile on my face not sure where to begin ... I was told why you gave me up, and I am so thankful you did. I have been so blessed with the life I have here. Thank you for making sure my parents were Christians. My faith is what makes me who I am. I guess I'll leave it at that for now. I'm just so curious. Again thank you so much, you have given me more than I could ask for. My life is so blessed ... I'm so blessed to be born to someone so selfless as to give me such a good family."

As I read the letter, I have to ask one question: What if... abortion had been the choice?

Ken Leach via Biblical Insights, Vol. 9, No. 11, November 2009

What Keeps a Local Congregation Going?

"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."

Acts 9:31

There is a formula for congregational life in this passage. Congregations of the Lord's church have been known to suffer death because the time honored principles of inspiration were ignored. Let's look at the inspired formula a little closer.

Local churches need rest. Rest is also "a time of peace." Every local church needs such peace. This was not peace resulting from diminishing the work and worship God assigned to her, but a time of peace from problems. The churches in Judea and Galilee had gone through both internal and external difficulties. By their faith and dedication to keeping the Lord's church active and alive, no difficulties hindered their growth. That's a lesson for us. A dedicated group of Christians can out last any problem that threatens their togetherness.

These churches were edified. That means they were strengthened and built up. Peter wrote, *"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 2:5). Any congregation that lives and grows must be built up. This requires the effort of every member of the congregation. *"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work"* (Eph. 4:16).

The churches "walked in the fear of the Lord." In order for a congregation to walk in the fear of the Lord, all the members must live by the same rule (Phil. 3:16). That rule is the will of the Lord. Those who fear the Lord never take liberties with his will. Walking by the same rule assures and maintains the blessed fellowship among those who seek to keep a local church active, well and going. Walking in the fear of the Lord is synonymous with walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all"* (2 Cor 13:14). Paul said the church is God's temple and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.

3:16-17).

There is no greater thing a group of Christians can do than to keep the local church active and going in the fear of the Lord.

A.T. Robertson said, "The multiplication of the disciples kept pace with the peace, the edification, the walking in the fear of the Lord, the comfort of the Holy Spirit." Never let any trifling thing disrupt the growth of God's church.

<http://www.vscoc.org/Bulletinfd/KeepCongregationgoing.htm>

What Kind of Christian Are YOU?

- Some are like wheelbarrows — have to be pushed;
- Some are like trailers — have to be pulled.
- Some are like kites — always trying to fly away.
- Some are like kittens — more contented when petted.
- Some are like footballs — you can never tell which way they will bounce.
- Some are like balloons — full of wind and ready to explode.
- Some are like neon signs — always going from on to off.
- Some are like a "dead" battery — no energy or power.
- Some are like the hitchhiker — want a free ride while others foot all the expenses.
- Some are like an iceberg — cold and dangerous.
- Some are like a candle under a basket — useless.
- Some are like salt mixed with sand — no saving power.
- Some are like little children — no sense of responsibility.
- Some are like falling leaves — carried away with the slightest wind of doctrine.
- Thank God, some are like the Rock of Gibraltar — Firm, Unmovable.

Before Whom I Stand

Eric Welch

In 1 Kings 17 the prophet Elijah appears suddenly in the narrative of Israel's history. He came declaring that no rain would fall in Israel, even before he knew that the Lord would provide for him his food and drink to survive. One of my favorite phrases ever uttered by Elijah is "...*the Lord the God of Israel...before whom I stand*" (v. 1). Then in verse 5, So he went and did according to the word of the LORD.

The thought "before whom I stand" is the essence of preaching. The preacher proclaims God's message in front of an audience every Sunday and Wednesday, but it is before God that he ultimately stands. He is responsible for delivering that message in its purity because God, not he, is the source of that message. He will be held accountable for proclaiming it as he hears it. He must proclaim it whether or not it is popular; he must proclaim it even when he is threatened with physical harm.

If God's man never forgets that he stands first before the Lord God, his preaching will be blessed and it will be powerful. It will convict the sinner; It will comfort the discouraged (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

This Friday we will have one of God's own, Brent Donoho, to stand before the Lord God declaring the message "If God is God (Then)..." Each message will reflect a part of that theme:

Friday "Pray"; Saturday "Share"; Sunday Bible Class – "Don't Doubt"; Sunday AM – "Stand Up"

Let us encourage him as he stands before us to proclaim God's message. Let us give Brent and the Lord our best in attendance. Let us give him our best ear to hear that message and then like Elijah be one who then "went and did according to the word of the LORD."