

## Fight for Your Life: Personal (Part 2)

Hebrews 3:12-14

There's a video on YouTube that I have watched multiple times that I can't get over. The video is of a photoshoot with a woman who practices a particular brand of martial arts. She's talking about how some of the moves from her martial arts brand are taken from movements of animals, like lions. So naturally, she wanted pictures taken with a lion. What could go wrong? So, they have a "trainer" who has the lion on a leash and this woman is next to the lion doing some of her poses. Keep in mind this lion is about 400 pounds.

At one point in the video the lion lunges at the woman and she trips as she is trying to get away from it. The trainer says, "Oh, he's just playful." So, naturally, they continue the shoot, because humans are morons. She begins doing her sequence of moves and the lion looks up at her, lunges at her and this time she doesn't see it coming. It gets her full on with its paws on her chest and knocks her over and gets on top of her. A camera man comes running in and kicks the lion in the face and it moves off her, but she is dazed and can barely move. Even as she is lying there, and the trainer is trying to control the lion it makes several more attempts to get at her.

The trainer keeps telling it "no", but here's the thing, it's a lion. This is what it does. It's the most natural thing in the world for a lion to try to kill something.

We have to see sin for what it truly is. You can't treat a 400 pound lion like my 40 pound labradoodle. One of my goals in this series is to help us change our perspective on sin so that we will be better able to fight it. We began last week by describing the 3 parts of this study of how to fight sin as concentric circles. We are starting in the middle and moving out from the personal or individual fight against sin to the relational and ultimately to the communal fight against sin. Last week we began the personal and I said over the next few weeks I would give us **4 Strategies to Fight Sin Personally.**

### **1. Be Who You Are**

The key verse last week was Romans 6:11. We are to calculate the reality of conversion and to understand the change that has been wrought in us. We are to live comparable to our new life in Christ. One author said it this way: "*Remaining,*

*indwelling sin is therefore the contradiction of all that he is as a regenerate person and son of God."* - John Murray

In order to Be Who You Are, you must understand who you are in Christ. This strategy is really at the heart of Paul's teaching on sanctification and growth. The Gospel changes us and we must continually go back to the gospel in order to have our thoughts, desires, and actions match the reality of our status in Christ.

## **2. Expose the Lies of Sin**

I told you a few minutes ago that you cannot treat a 400 pound lion like a 40 pound house pet. We have to recognize sin for what it is. But here's the hard part. Sin does not present itself as a 400 pound lion bent on destroying you. It presents itself as the house pet. But sin always lies to us. It never tells us the truth. It never says to you, this affair will completely ruin your life and the heartbreak will be almost unbearable. Instead, sin deceives at every turn.

Think about what happened in the garden of Eden. The serpent says two things. "Did God really say?" and "You will not surely die." Both are lies. God did really say and they did really die. Had there been no lie, no deception, there would have been no sin. Both Adam and Eve bought into the lie. They believed they would be like God in some unique way. They believed they would be better off by eating the fruit and they believed that God had kept something from them.

When we talk about the fight with sin, this is where the fight takes place. It's a fight to expose the lies of sin, because they are always there. There is no time where sin tells the truth in its fullness. *"All sin takes its origin from false views of things."* - Archibald Alexander

This is the DNA of sin. It's not honest. Not upfront. Not forthcoming. I want to show you this in two biblical texts, one OT and one NT. Turn with me to Isaiah 44:9-20. In this text God is pointing out that idolatry is wrong for sure. But more than wrong, when you worship something other than God, which is the essence of all sin, you are giving into a lie. Your heart has been fooled. Let's read it.

The key verse is verse 20. He feeds on ashes. He thinks that ashes will satisfy his hunger and nourish his body, but they obviously cannot meet his physical needs. He's deluded. But here's the scariest part about believing this lie, it becomes easier and easier to buy into the lie. You actually begin to think the lie is the truth

and you are so self-deceived you aren't even aware anymore. You don't even think you are chewing on ashes. You actually believe the ashes are good for you.

Now turn with me to Hebrews 3:12-14. The author of Hebrews is warning the Christians not to fall away from their faith in God and he uses the OT Israelites as an example of what this looks like. They turned from believing God in the wilderness to believing that He wasn't good. So the author of Hebrews applies this lesson to the Christians. Look at verse 12.

You can see that he's warning them about an unbelieving heart. Turning from God and to sin always involves a lack of faith in God. It's a failure to trust God's character and to believe the promises and warnings He gives in Scripture. So, what do we do to avoid an unbelieving heart? Look at verse 13. We exhort one another with the truth of the gospel that directly contradicts the deceitful lies of sin.

You can see here that the warning is against becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Believing the lies is like insulating ourselves from the truths of the gospel. But true believers persevere in the faith. Look at verse 14.

So, what do we do to keep on believing? The answer here is to fight for faith in God's Word and the gospel by exposing the lies of sin with the truth. So, this means when we are tempted to sin we have to carefully consider what lie or lies sin is telling us. Then we have to know the gospel well enough to counteract those lies with the truth.

Let's use the example of pornography to try and help us see this method of exposing lies and believing the truth. Pornography as an industry makes around 100 billion a year with the total revenue exceeding that of MLB, the NBA and the NFL combined. There are many lies that porn preaches in order to get people to engage, but let's narrow in on just one. This sin doesn't really affect anyone else. Viewing pornography means you have bought into the lie that people are objects to be used for your pleasure and discarded when you are finished with them. This lie will reshape your view of people and ultimately the way you act toward people. You will begin to see all relationships as consumer like relationships where that person is there to meet some "want" of mine and to be thrown aside when that "want" is satisfied. Besides the impact this sin has on sex-trafficking, prostitution, and the way in which it destroys families and marriages.

Instead, the gospel calls us to view every human being as made in the image of God and worthy of dignity and respect. People are not objects to be used. They are image bearers to be loved and served.

Maybe this is not your particular sin struggle or temptation, but let me encourage you to identify what your struggle is then expose the lies it is telling you. In order to sin you are buying some lie that sin is selling. Then, consider how the gospel defeats that lie. Let me just say that you can see from Hebrews 3:13 how necessary other believers are in this fight for faith. We are to exhort one another. One of the best ways to fight sin is through good and biblical conversations with other believers.

### **3. Cultivate a New Affection**

Even as we talk about exposing the lies of sin there's a danger in thinking the battle for sin is only fought in our heads. We sometimes believe if we can just "think" the right thoughts we will beat sin. But that's not how human beings work. We are driven by our desires and passions. Listen to how the Apostle John put this in 1 John 2:15-16. You either love the Father or the world. It's about the affections and passions we have.

In order to effectively fight sin we have to have changed hearts. All we have talked about so far is meant to change what we want, but in this strategy we want to make it more explicit. You will never truly fight sin and overcome sin until you replace the desire for sin with the desire for Christ.

Bethany and I have only ever been to Ruth's Chris steak house twice in our lives. Ruth's Chris is a steak house that serves steaks at like 700 degrees with the butter still bubbling on the plate as the steak arrives at your table. For the two of us to eat dinner there was well over \$100 and the only reason we went is because we twice received large gift cards to go. Eating a steak there is a sublime experience. The steak is so tender and flavorful that your mouth explodes with pleasure the moment you take a bite.

So, let me tell you what didn't happen when we left Ruth's Chris after indulging in a 12 ounce filet mignon. We didn't pull through the McDonalds drive through on the way home and grab a Big Mac. Neither of us had any desire for a \$3.99 hamburger with special sauce after eating a filet.

Here's the real issue with sin. We are hungry for satisfaction and we look in all the wrong places for fulfillment. The problem is not that we want something but that our wants are aimed in the wrong direction. Here's how C.S. Lewis described this:

*"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."* – C.S. Lewis

Biblically speaking we are talking about putting off the old man and putting on the new man. We exchange one desire for a new one. Sinful desires are rooted in lies and godly desires are rooted in the truth of the gospel. Listen to how Paul explains this in Ephesians 4:17-24.

There's a sermon by a very old Scottish preacher named Thomas Chalmers that has been very helpful to me when thinking about this exchange of desires. It's called The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. The whole point is that your heart abhors a vacuum of desire. If we simply try to put to death our desire for sin we won't ever be able to do it. Our hearts must be captured by a greater and more appealing affection. Here's what he says:

*"In a word, if the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of one great and ascendant object, is to fasten it in positive love to another, then it is not by exposing the worthlessness of the former, but by addressing to the mental eye the worth and excellence of the latter, that all old things are to be done away and all things are to become new."* - Thomas Chalmers

Here's our tactic then. Address to your mental eye the worth and excellence of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Listen to 2 Corinthians 3:18. If we are to eliminate the love of sin we must hold up the glory of Christ. We must become enamored with God's beauty displayed in His Son.

So, what does this functionally look like in our lives? We must become people who explore God's Word. Notice, I didn't just say read or study. Those two actions are necessary in order to explore, but we must be biblical explorers.

When I was a kid I used to go to my friend's house who a forest right behind his house that we could explore. Children delight in exploration because of the

potential of discovery and the sense of wonder. When you explore you are taking in every detail of what's around you and you are poised and ready. You may not always know exactly what you are looking for, but there's a sense of wonder and curiosity. As you explore you are also trying to understand how this new area fits into what you already know. Exploring those woods meant making a mental map, and sometimes a physical map of what we found.

Maybe we don't explore the Bible because we assume there's nothing exciting to be found there. We view daily Bible reading as a chore because we don't expect much. Instead we should take the perspective of the Psalmist regarding the Bible. Listen to Psalm 119:14. How about Psalm 119:162? And if you explore God's Word in search of treasures this will be the result. Psalm 119:11.

Your heart cannot be captured by the riches of God's Word and the "riches" of sin. You cannot be enamored with the glory of the gospel and the "glory" of The American Dream. One or the other will control your life.

Let's give ourselves to God's Word so we can expose the lies of sin and cultivate a new affection that will push sin out of our hearts.