

The Christian's Conflict

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- [0 : 00] Well, last week we saw that sin's dominion is ended. So we're going through Sinclair Ferguson's book, The Christian Life. It's a doctrinal introduction.
- And so our last week's chapter was on sin's dominion is ended. And I said we need to make sure that we don't fall into two ditches.
- One, of living like we're still slaves to sin, as if nothing radical has happened to us. But there is an extreme on the other side, isn't there?
- And so almost every Bible truth has its own complementary truth that goes alongside it, that nuances it, that amplifies it.
- And so in this case, when we're talking about sin's dominion is ended, there is an extreme on the other side. The Bible, it very rarely has easy, simplistic truths that you can just take from one verse.
- [1 : 09] There are truths that are complementary, that almost sometimes appear to contradict each other, but they're both true. And so you have to learn to look at it as a whole and not just through a narrow lens.
- So imagine a pool cue, a cue stick. If you were to take that cue stick and you were to look at it dead on, straight, directly on the end, what would it look like?
- Well, it would look like a flat, round, maybe white because of the chalk, or brown circle. But if you were to just turn that cue stick a little bit, you'd see that it's not just a flat, round circle.
- It's a whole stick, and it's not just one color. It's multi. It's different colors, usually. That's the same way with biblical truth.
- You have to look at the whole thing to see the truth for what it is, and that's the same for biblical truth. You can't look at just one verse, generally, and come to the whole conclusion of the matter.
- [2 : 18] It's a tapestry. It's woven. And so just as if you were to look at a quilt, and if you looked at one single square, you might say, well, it's red.
- But if you back out and look at the whole thing, you see, oh, it's all these different colors that make this quilt. So we are dead to sin.
- Sin's dominion is over. Satan is a defeated foe. He knows his time is short.
- But what else is true about Satan? He's a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. So he's defeated, but he's a roaring lion still on the prowl.
- We are free from sin, but that doesn't mean that we're going to be sinless here. No, we carry around the flesh. We're still exposed to the dangers and the temptations that rise from this principle, this power of sin that is still in us.
- [3 : 29] Its reign is broken, but it still exerts power. It still exerts influence. So I know this is probably not true of any of you, but some people think anything less than tranquil peace in the Christian life above it all is a failure to believe.

It's a failure of faith. On the other hand, there are those who view the Christian life and the Christian pilgrimage as something so gloomy, so difficult, we'll say, that the salvation is all in the future.

That there's no good here. It's all in the future. But the truth is, we are fighting. But we're fighting a beaten enemy.

The Christian life isn't supposed to be a miserable slog here where there's no present peace, there's no present joy, there's no experience of victory. But it's not a walk in the park either.

Both are true. So there's joy and peace and believing. And at the same time, we can sing that hymn, not just at the beginning of our Christian life, but throughout our Christian life.

[4 : 55] We can sing, just as I am, though tossed about, with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears, within, and without.

Jesus I come. Or, O Lamb of God, I come. So, theologians call this whole, this tension, this situation, as the already and the not yet.

The already and the not yet. Now, we live in a very unique, one of a kind, not going to last very long time.

So, Jesus Christ has come. And the Bible says, we are now presently, therefore, living in the last days.

You think of yourself that way. I am living in the last days. Now, I think we normally think of, oh, those last days. And, we have all sorts of ideas about, what it's going to be like, at the very end.

[6 : 05] And, maybe some of those are true. But, the way the Bible talks, is, we are now presently, living in the last days. On the redemptive timetable. As God looks at his schedule.

As God looks at his calendar. At his, what he is going to accomplish, and do, and bring about. The world, the timeline, this present timeline, is now running out.

We are in the last days. There's no major obstacles, to overcome. 1 Peter 4, 7 says, the end of all things, is near. That was true, 2,000 years ago.

And, if that was true, 2,000 years ago, it's still true today. So, there's no major obstacles, to cross, so to speak. The days are now, running to a close.

So, imagine you have a bathtub, and it's full of water, and you pull the plug. That's the time we are in. The water is draining away.

[7 : 06] There's nothing anyone can do, to stop it. Christ's resurrection, pulled the plug. And so, here we are. And I'm saying, this is a one of a kind, age that we're in.

And so, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, 11, that the Old Testament, was written down, as warnings for us, on whom, the fulfillment, of the ages, has come.

The fulfillment, the completion, of the end, of days, has come upon us. So, the tub is going dry. We belong to the next age, but here we are, still.

the devil is still here. The world is still here. My flesh is still here. And, we are waiting.

We are waiting for the end of the world. We're waiting for the end of flesh. The flesh, and the end of Satan. The point is, is that we are in this place of tension.

[8 : 18] We're in this place of, we're waiting. Some very significant, and radical, and amazing things have happened. And, and now we're waiting for those, to complete themselves, to finish.

But, here's the good news. D-Day, has happened. The, the, the tide has turned. We were in winter.

Spring has broken. And now, a summer wind, is blowing, bringing in, the summer. But, for now, we, we are facing these three enemies.

And, you can see all of them, in 1st John chapter 2. And so, I want you to turn there, 1st John chapter 2. And, all of this material, is, is not going to be new, to you.

None of it, is going to be new to you. But, we're going to be talking about, about the Christians conflicts, today.

[9 : 27] Especially, his conflicts, from without. So, 1st John chapter 2, verse 14. John, writing, to the people there, he says, I, write to you fathers, because you have known him, who is from the beginning.

I, I, write to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have come, overcome the evil one. Then he says, do not love the world, or anything in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has, and does, comes not from the world, from the Father, but from, the world.

Now, he's talking to young men. He might be speaking poetically. He might be referring to all of God's people, as young, strong, men.

So, just as, you know, as a population, there's probably no group of people stronger, than 20 and 25 year old men. And so, he's saying, in this sense, you are like young men.

[10 : 47] Perhaps that's what he's saying. And he's saying, the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome, the evil one. And then he talks to everyone, and he says, don't love the world.

There's the other enemy. And, why can't you love the world, and the Father at the same time? Because they're totally opposed, to each other.

And then you can see, the flesh, in action. You see it there, in verses 16 and 17. The cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, the boasting of what he has and does, is not from the Father, but from the world.

So, there's this conflict, that comes from outside of us. It is the world, and it is Satan, and, that's what we're going to talk about today.

We're going to talk about the flesh, Lord willing, next week. So, let's talk about the world. Now, I want you to put your thinking caps on.

[11 : 52] When, when the New Testament writers, they're writing these epistles, how do they address, the people that they're writing to?

What's a common way, of addressing them? Can you think of anything? What's sort of some general rules, about what they, how they do that? Dad?

Brother. Brother? What else? Beloved. Beloved? Saints. Saints. Friends.

Friends. You're missing some pretty significant ones. Children.

Children. Fellow heirs. Those are all right. All right. But you're, you're missing a whole category of how they, they, address the people.

[12 : 57] Pilgrims. Okay. I'm going to give the answer because you guys aren't getting it. They talk about brothers and sisters and fellow Christians and saints.

But he's writing, Paul says, when he's writing the Corinthians, he writes to those who are in Corinth. And in Philippi.

And when he's writing to the Ephesians, he, he writes to those who are in Ephesus. And he does it by including everything that you guys talked about with their geographic location.

So the Corinthians were in Corinth, sanctified in Christ. You are in Corinth, sanctified in Christ. The Ephesians were saints.

Whoever said that saints in Ephesus, the Philippians were in Christ. Jesus in Philippi. It's two worlds, isn't it?

[13 : 59] It's two. It's really two places that we live in at the same time. So we are in Christ. Everything that we talked about is, is true.

The, the tide has turned. We are in Christ. Resurrection life by the Holy spirit is living in us. Winter is over. Spring has come. There's a summer wind blowing. We live in Christ, but you know what else?

We live in Bremen. And we live in Plymouth. And we live in Mishawaka and South Bend and Warsaw and Napanee. We love and we serve Jesus.

And we keep close to him. And we drive down U.S. 30 to go to work. We drive up 31 or down 31 to go to work.

We walk through Meyer. And we go and we do our shopping in Walmart. And we're here in this world. And in this world, that means we're going to be walking and living with the temptations and the pressures of what it means to be a Christian, to be in Christ Jesus in Bremen, in Plymouth, in Mishawaka and all the rest.

[15 : 20] We live in a world where people, and we go to work with people who use appalling language. Appalling language.

We talk about sex all the time. We live in a world where phones and computers and a world of temptation comes through those screens.

And we live in a world where, now on YouTube, it seems like half of the trending videos are men wearing makeup and dressing up like women.

What a world that we live in. But here's the comfort. Christ wants us here.

Christ wants you where you are at. Christ wants us here. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

[16 : 27] They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them with your truth. Christ wants us here.

We are right where we are supposed to be. But at the same time, he says, sanctify them with your truth. There is holy living in an unholy world.

There is Christian living, godly living, God-pleasing living in an unholy world. We can be sanctified. Jesus is praying.

He says, I don't pray that you take them out of the world, but I do pray that you would sanctify them in it. That you would protect them while they're there. And so the world wants to squeeze us into its mold.

The world wants us to be just like them. Are you okay being different? Are you okay being unpopular?

[17 : 31] Are you okay not fitting in? There is a powerful, I think in a certain way, God-given desire that we all have to fit in, to belong, to be a part of a community.

It's not good for man to be alone. We were made to live with other people. We were made to feel connected to other people.

But the question is, are you okay being disconnected from the world? Resisting the world?

Romans 12, one again, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, the mold of this world. The Christian life is all about de-conforming ourselves from this world.

Being non-conformists. So how does the world try to mold us into its pattern? How does the world try to pressure us to not live godly lives, but to live according to its pattern?

[18 : 44] Jesus said, he's talking about the gospel coming and he's talking about how it falls on different soils. And you remember some of the word gets sown among the thorns. And the thorns grew up and they choked the plant.

Do you remember what those thorns were? What did they represent? The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.

The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. And that's what it what the world has and what it's trying to do in your life.

The word or the world will choke out God's word. It will choke out the gospel. It can choke out even our spiritual life.

It can drain us of spiritual life if it can get its two hands wrapped around our throat. And you can believe it that the world wants to get its two hands wrapped around your throat.

[19 : 56] The one hand is the cares of this world. The cares of this world. What shall I eat? What shall I drink?

What shall I wear? What does this person think of me? What about my retirement? How many Instagram followers do I have?

How many Instagram likes do I see? The cares of this world is everything that the world is obsessed with. Everything that the world is obsessed with.

So what's on their mind? What is so precious and important to them that they care about? It concerns them. It worries them.

They think about it. They plan for it. They plot for it. And what you see is in the world every concern and care that they have is time bound.

[20 : 55] This world bound. It doesn't see over the horizon into eternity at all. So that's one hand. The world wants to get that one hand on your throat.

you should care about everything that we are caring about. And if we can start to make you care about those things and to the degree that you do become more and more obsessed with those things and those burden you that you care about them the more they'll choke out your spiritual life.

Then he says on the other side is the deceitfulness or the delight in wealth and riches. That's the other hand. that it wants to get on your throat.

It's all about the pleasure that money or wealth promises. It's not about whether you have it or not. It's not about whether you have it or not.

It's whether you unthinkingly believe the lie that the world is telling you about wealth. You're believing its promise.

[22 : 05] You're delighting in what it says it can offer. So one hand and then the other hand and the more they have your neck the more that they are strangling you the tighter grip they can get on you the more they suck the life out of you.

The spiritual vitality out of you. And even in the Christian life the spiritual vitality the joy the peace the closeness the walking with the Lord all of that stuff can get sucked out of you.

That's what the world wants when it when it comes to dominate you. That's how it wants to control you. It wants them to be just it wants you to be just like them.

They don't care about God. They don't care about eternity. They just want what they can get here. They're worried about what they have to worry about here. And notice I just want you to notice this that choking is not chopping your head off.

Choking is not all of a sudden is it? Choking is a slow action where they get a tighter and tighter grip on your throat.

[23 : 19] So it's not all of a sudden. It's a slow strangulation. That's what the world wants to do. It creeps up on you. And before you know it, your garden is full of thorns choking your spiritual life out of you.

And so we're all in danger. The rich? Yes. The poor? Yes. We're all in danger in this world if we believe it's glamour, if we believe it's promise, if it's getting its hands around our neck.

That's the world's bait is the glamour, the promise, the deceitfulness of wealth. It's promising, and you notice it says the deceitfulness of wealth. What is so deceitful about it?

Well, the promise is you're going to get to keep it. That's the promise. That's the lie.

That's the essential lie. you're going to be able to keep it. But there's a lie buried in it. And the lie is that it'll just go on forever. Listen to John Calvin here.

[24 : 39] All the things which make for the enriching of this present life are sacred gifts of God. Okay? This is not asceticism. This is not saying you can't have any enjoyable things or God doesn't give these things to us.

Listen again. All the things which make for the enriching of this present life are sacred gifts of God, but we spoil them by our misuse of them.

If we want to know the reason why, it is because we are always entertaining the delusion that we will go on forever in this world, the result is that the very things which ought to be of assistance to us in our pilgrimage through life become chains which bind us.

How do you use all those good physical gifts that God has given you? You use them as a help, but what we do is we turn them into chains, and they chain us down.

They chain us to this world. The Lord has given us good gifts to enjoy. They weren't meant to choke our spiritual life out of us.

[25 : 59] They were meant to enhance our spiritual life. That's one thing the world is after. It wants to bog us down, chain us up, suck the vitality out of our spiritual life.

It is an enemy that we need to be aware of and see what it's doing, see how it's making inroads in our lives, and then we need to repent of those things and pull them out.

Now, let's talk about the devil. The devil. There seems to be two dangers when we're dealing with the devil.

The first is that we pay too little attention to him. I think this happens very naturally for us. We live in a very scientific age where so much superstition has been driven out.

We can kind of think of the devil as that sort of thing. We can just naturally think and look at everything through a naturalistic lens where there's no such thing as supernatural.

[27 : 09] supernatural. So we can pay too little attention to him, and secondly, we can make so much of him that we lose sight of Christ and his victory.

I think the first is probably our greater danger. Some people make too much of him such that they don't take responsibility for anything that they do.

I don't think that's where we're at. So we need to realize that Satan is not God. I know that's a real profound statement.

Satan is not God, and that means he cannot be everywhere at once. He can't know everything. He doesn't know everything. I think he's a very good student, and I think he has studied mankind for a long time, and he's seen people like you before, and he's had lots of practice, but he doesn't know everything.

Satan is a creature. And that means he's limited. Greater than us, but far less than God. Satan is a creature. He's made by God.

[28 : 18] He's made by God for his own glory. It seems clear to me, now there might be some questioning, but that he was once a cherubim, a guardian angel, one of the highest of all the angels who lived in the presence of God, and apparently sometime before the fall of man, he fell, and Revelation says he took a third of the angels with him.

Now, I don't think that's a numerical, precise number, but the point is it wasn't a majority. Most of the angels stayed true to the Lord, stayed faithful to God, but it wasn't a small number either, a third.

what does the Bible say about him? He is a slanderer. That's one of the names that one of one name that he has.

He's the slanderer. He slanders God. He twists the truth about God. He does it directly. He does it indirectly. He twists the truth about Jesus Christ.

He twists the character of God. He's a roaring lion. That means a lion is not an animal that just charges directly straight into its prey.

[29 : 40] Not at first anyways. He's an ambush predator. He's a lion looking to see how he can devour. You've all seen enough documentaries to know how a lion attacks its prey.

It sneaks up. And that's generally how he prefers. He wants to catch his prey unaware.

So he's a liar. He tells us lies, but he himself masquerades as an angel of light. Revelation pictures a monster that has two horns like a lamb.

time. And so he looks sort of like the lamb of God. In Revelation, he looks sort of like the lamb of God, but it says his voice is the voice of a dragon. He looks kind of like Jesus sometimes.

And yet when he speaks, he can't hide what he is. he likes to lead people astray.

[30 : 53] He's an angel of light. You remember in Pilgrim's Progress when the flatterer comes. The flatterer is all dressed in white, I think, if I'm remembering this correctly. And he leads Christian and hopeful astray.

They follow him thinking that he knows the way to go. And by the time he is done with them, they are facing completely the wrong way. that's the devil.

He likes to lead people astray. In English folklore, there are little fairies called will-o-wisps or another name for them are hinky punks.

And they are these little lights, these malicious fairies that live in swamps and lead travelers astray. So you're wandering through some sort of bog and you're trying to find your way.

And all of a sudden you see a little light in front of you and it's these fairies and they're trying to get you to follow them. And that's what their goal is. And you end up face down drowned in the swamp.

[32 : 01] That's Satan. Promising light, showing a path, but leading to destruction.

people. And bit by bit, people follow him to their own doom. He never has to lay hands on them. He never has to have a direct assault on them.

He just needs to get them to follow. He's deceitful. So just how did he come after Eve? It wasn't through direct assault.

It wasn't appearing as Apollyon to Eve. It was through just some cunning words, some half truths, some shading, some confusion.

He's an accuser. I think we need to realize that Satan is neither fair nor consistent. He will tempt you to sin, and then when you have sinned, he will make it his aim to accuse you into despair.

[33 : 06] his ultimate weapon, Paul writes in Colossians, is nothing less than the law of God.

Satan can use the very law of God to destroy men. He wields God's own law to see men condemned, and that's why Paul says, Jesus disarmed the powers and the authorities.

That is, these angelic powers. How? By canceling the written code with its regulations, nailing it to his cross. Now, if you're following, and if you're following what I'm saying, you'll see this great danger.

You'll see his subtlety. He can take even the law of God and fill it with his dragon voice.

and so we can hear the law, and it's not Christ speaking, it's the dragon speaking. So, how can we see through his tricks, his schemes?

[34 : 21] How can we distinguish between the voice of the Lamb of God, and how can we hear then between the voice of the Lamb of God and then the false lamb, the dragon?

I just want you to think carefully about this because we are not unaware of his devices. And he will use them on you. And if you're going to fight the fight, you need to know your enemy's tactics and your enemy's weapons.

So, how can we tell the difference between Christ's voice by the spirit and Satan's voice? Well, first, Christ does use the same law to convict men of their sin.

He can say, here is the standard, here is how you've failed. But Christ never presses us so far that we lose all hope. We will lose hope in ourselves, we will lose hope in our obedience, but at the same time, Christ is directing us to himself.

it's not all wrath, but there is a promise of forgiveness, there's always hope. Now, we said this last week, Satan wields despair like a spear. It's one of his greatest and strongest weapons.

[35 : 40] He wants to crush us, to destroy us, to leave us paralyzed, not going anywhere. Now, the Spirit of God, when he brings conviction, he moves us to repentance, to action, to living, active faith.

when Satan brings conviction, he moves us to paralyze, to be paralyzed, to paralysis, to despair. He uses it to destroy us, to leave us helpless.

How else can we distinguish between Christ and the devil? The devil takes the scripture piecemeal. he takes off a little chunk of it and he'll use it.

So, you remember when he was tempting Jesus in the desert, he was able to use the scriptures. He was able to quote quite fine and apply it to Jesus.

He was able to take Psalm 90 and apply it to Jesus. And so, that's the way the devil uses it. But, when Jesus speaks, he uses all the truth.

[37 : 00] Satan does it and perverted uses it for perverted self-serving ways. Jesus uses it to encourage us. So, what else? Christ's wisdom is like himself.

It's peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere, peacemakers who sow in peace, raise a harvest of righteousness.

But, Satan's wisdom is full of selfish ambition and evil desire. Jesus will make us wise good. And the devil, if we're full of his wisdom, will make us clever and evil.

Christ deals with his people gently. Satan deals with his people or with us. His entreaties are like flaming arrows, is how it's put.

Sinclair Ferguson says, what are these flaming arrows? Well, they set the mind on fire. They produce panic in the will, unbalancing our faith.

[38 : 15] when Satan is dealing with us, he wants to set our house on fire. And I want you to think of if you woke up in the middle of the night and your house is on fire, what kind of calm state of mind are you in?

No, you're full of panic, you're full of fear, you're full of dreadful drastic action and hopefully it's all for good. But what I'm saying is when Satan launches his fiery arrows, he's trying to catch our spiritual houses on fire and so that we are full of panic, we're full of fear and we're set on fire.

Christ calls us into fellowship into his sufferings. He says take up your cross and follow me. He says the cross precedes the crown.

Satan is always trying to steer us away from suffering. suffering. He always makes suffering to be the worst of the worst. He always makes suffering the closing and completely damning answer.

This is why God doesn't love you. He's making you suffer. This is not good. You're suffering. Satan steers our mind away from any good that suffering does for us.

[39 : 35] But Jesus says, no, you're joining me and my suffering. So, Christ is speaking to us by the Spirit through the Word, and the devil is speaking to us, and sometimes it's straight into our heart, and sometimes it's through the world.

And so, I guess, brothers and sisters, I want you to, I hope today has been a tune-up for your ears, and a tune-up for your heart. We need to learn to hear the difference.

We need to stay away from the evil one. We need to resist him and his lies, and we need to walk close to Jesus. We need to have our swords drawn, and the shield of faith up, and our helmets of salvation on, and our feet ready with the gospel.

We need to realize we are in a battle. We need to take on the full armor of God, and we go to fight. The war is won, but there is still some fighting to do, so let's stick with it, and let's stick close to Jesus, and he'll help us in this fight.

[illegible]