May the Lord’s peace reign in your heart.

As the COVID drags on, unrest continues, and a nasty election is looming, it is easy to become discouraged and be overwhelmed with the feeling of just wanting everything to be over and get back to normal. Here is where we are called to be strong in the Lord and persevere.

Perseverance is a very important concept in the Bible. In the Old Testament accounts, time and again we read of the saints waiting, sometimes for years, sometimes for their whole lives, for God to fulfill His promises. Many times, they waited under adverse conditions. I’m sure that sometimes, they just wanted things to get back to normal.

The New Testament brings up perseverance many times. Jesus even told us how necessary it is. What this perseverance is referring to is remaining faithful to Christ, and waiting for His promises to be fulfilled, regardless of what happens in life.

Unstable times are no time to turn from Jesus. He is our rock; He is our fortress; He is stable because He is unchanging and He is protection that nothing can break through. We may become weary and be knocked around but He will never leave us nor forsake us. He is faithful. Persevere.

*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

 James 1:12

In Christ’s love

John

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Genesis 3:1-6

In this Biblical account, here at the beginning of chapter 3 in Genesis, we read of the first sin ever committed by a human-being. The sin doesn’t seem that bad on the surface; Adam and Eve ate fruit from a tree that God had told them not to eat from. How often in our lives do we do something that God specifically told us not to do? But, look what came from that one little sin. All the dishonesty, all the theft, all the crime, all the rape and murder and kidnapping that take place in the world. From this sin came all the wars that have ever been fought. From sampling this fruit came all the death and decay and poverty that continues to this day and will continue until Jesus comes back.

This first act of rebellion against God has opened floodgates of evil on this world. We see it in the oppression of human-beings who were made in the image of God. Oppression by governments that ought to be caring for the people they govern. Oppression in the form of slavery: From the forced servitude of the ancient world, to the slavery of dark-skinned people who were sold for their labor, to the present-day human-trafficking of men, women, and children for labor and for women, children, and babies for forced prostitution. And no less sinful are those who pay for the services of the enslaved. There are things that happen in this world that we don’t even want to think about, let alone see or be a part of.

Although sin is spiritual in nature, it has terrible physical consequences. All the diseases and sicknesses of the world are the result of sin. All the cancers, all the diabetes, all the physical deformities are the collective effect of sin on our bodies; not necessarily the individual’s sin, but the presence of the power of evil on the earth. Of course, there is the obvious effect that God told Adam and Eve would happen if they ate of the fruit: physical and spiritual death.

In all people groups and nations, there is pride, arrogance, selfishness, and immorality. These are not only the result of sin, but are sins themselves; thus, sin propagates itself. The effects of sin are sadness, loneliness, pain, anger, brokenness; all the things that make this life hard.

As Christians, we must understand and keep forefront in our minds, exactly how evil sin is. Christians have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and it is our natural human tendency to push the heinousness of sin out of our minds. It is very easy to take for granted the fact that our sins have been removed from us: past, present, and future. But that cleansing does not excuse us from fighting against committing sin. As we can see from Eve taking that first bite of fruit, sin has long ranging far reaching consequences. Its effects spread like the rings from a stone thrown into the water; the difference is, that the rings in the water diminish over time, the rings from sin increase.

Christians must be aware that all sin, even sin that has been forgiven, has consequences. A classic Biblical illustration of this is the Judean king Manasseh. The accounts of King Manasseh are told in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. Manasseh was very evil in the sight of the LORD; he practiced all forms of idolatry and caused all the people of Israel to practice also. He is specially noted for spilling a huge amount of innocent blood in Judea. Manasseh was captured and taken to a foreign kingdom where he actually repented of his sins and called upon God. God miraculously brought him back to being king in Judah, where he continued to be faithful to God. Yet we read in 2 Kings 23:26, “*However, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him*.” The Babylonians were still allowed to conquer Jerusalem, in large part, due to the forgiven sins of Manasseh.

When we accept Jesus, as we grow in our understanding of what He has done for us, sin should become more and more repulsive to us. In our Christian walk, we ought to develop a greater realization of how holy God is and how much He hates sin; how offensive it is to Him. Remember that sin brings God to wrath; and because He is just, all sin must be punished. We know the cross was a place of mercy. The work done on the cross saves us from suffering the punishment due to us. But the cross is also a place of justice; it is the place where God’s righteous wrath for the sins committed by those who accept Christ, was poured out on Jesus. Any sins we commit now, even as Christians, add to what Jesus had to suffer.

As we dwell on the idea of Jesus suffering agony in our place; as we dwell on God sacrificing His beloved Son to save us; the unimaginable love they have for us draws us to them. We want to love them back. Jesus told us in John 14:15, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*.” Also, in Matthew 17:5 we read what God the Father told us concerning His Son, “*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!*” From these, we can see that one of the best ways for us to show our love for God and our Saviour is to avoid sin.

In this, we can see one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and the world’s religions. While all have their commands or rules to follow, the world’s religions must follow the rules to attain heaven or favor from the deity. For the Christian, Jesus has already won our salvation; we follow His commands because we love Him and want to please Him. As we are told in 1 John 5:3, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome*.”

We need to look closely at our text for today because we can learn some of satan’s tactics. The ones he used in deceiving Eve into disobeying God are still being used today. First, when he asked “*Indeed, has God said*…?”, he was drawing Eve’s attention away from all the good and beautiful things in her life and focusing her on something God told her not to do. How often do we find ourselves thinking about what we don’t have or can’t have? It is very easy for us to forget the blessings that God has provided us with when we focus on something we don’t have. We aren’t good at thinking about more than one thing at a time and satan will use that against us.

Eve knew that there was a tree in the garden whose fruit they were to avoid. God had told them to stay away from it and He had even told them the consequences for eating it. We can detect in Eve’s answer that although she knew about the tree and the command, it wasn’t something she thought about. She simply accepted what God said and didn’t consider messing with the tree or it’s fruit. It is really something to see how easy it would be if we could simply believe God and not question anything He said. Because of sin being in the world, that is not possible for us now; but the time is coming when this will be the way of life once again.

Satan’s next tactic is a bold-faced lie. He directly counters what God said would happen; and in doing so, accuses God of being a liar. He tells Eve, “*You surely will not die*!” For the first time in her life, it occurs to Eve to question the word of God. What a tragedy happens here. From the lips of satan, the first lie on earth is told, which leads to the countless lies told ever since. For the first time, a human-being, created in the image of God, questions the integrity of her creator. The worst part is that this blasphemous lie and blasphemous doubt are against God who is absolutely holy and perfect. How horrible to see that doubt and accusation have spread throughout the world and have continued until now. To besmirch the character of God is inexcusable because of His justice and holiness, because of His love and mercy.

When we see that satan was willing to lie in the way that he did, and especially about God, it gives us a clue about his nature. Jesus spells it out for us in John 8:44, “*Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies*.” It follows then, that as Christians, it ought to be reprehensible for us to lie. Any time we lie or try to deceive, we are walking in the very footsteps of satan himself. Our desire is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. And we need to keep this in mind for any sin. If we sin, we are following satan. We don’t want to follow satan for two reasons. The primary reason is that doing so is to go against a loving and holy God, who deserves our worship and love and devotion. The second reason is because we know where satan is going to end up and we don’t want to follow him there.

Finally satan tells Eve “*For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*.” He mixes truth with lie in order to deceive; in order to cause Eve to sin and to bring eternal condemnation on the human race. What he insinuates is that God is holding out on her; that there is more she could have, but God doesn’t want her to have it.

This thought is prevalent today; that God just doesn’t want us to enjoy ourselves or have fun. Our human nature feels that God is a tyrant who tries to keep us under His thumb and keep us from doing what we want to do. He is in the way of our freedom. With the Holy Spirit indwelling us, Christians can see that everything God tells us is for our own good and is best for us. But even with that awareness, our flesh still fights against God’s commands and wants to fulfill its own lusts. This all comes as a result of what happened in the garden. Sin entered the world at satan’s instigation and mankind’s disobedience.

Satan succeeds in getting Eve to focus on the tree; on the one thing she can’t have. *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate*. Sin was unleashed into the world. Its destructive power began immediately. Although she didn’t know it, her spirit died; her fellowship with God was ruined. The next thing for sin to do was spread. Eve tempted her husband and Adam also sinned by eating of the fruit. His spirit also died. Many years later, their physical bodies would also die which was not part of God’s desire.

They did the same thing that mankind has been doing ever since; they made a pathetic attempt to hide the evidence of their sin by using leaves to cover their nakedness. When God confronted them, they turned to blaming someone else. Adam said “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate*.” He blamed God and Eve. Eve said “*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*.” True; but, the ultimate decision to sin was hers. How ready all of us are to blame someone else for our failures.

This was the beginning of the mess we live in today; a world under the power and rule of satan. Christians live in this world but we should never submit to his rule. Again, it is so important for us to do our best, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to avoid sin. When we avoid sin, it brings glory to our Saviour who gave everything for us. It shows him our deep appreciation for what He did and for who He is. And this is really what the goal of the Christian life is: To glorify God; especially in the face of His enemies.

Prayer

Loving God, You are so worthy of all our love and devotion. As sinful people, we can do nothing pleasing to You outside of Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the salvation He has earned for us on the cross. Thank You for seeing His righteousness now when You look upon us. Because of these things, we can offer You acceptable worship and praise.

We humbly ask for a stronger presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We ask for that work of His to keep us from sin. When our focus wanders from Christ and onto our own lusts, Holy Spirit, alert us; bring to our minds the goodness of God and remind us of His desire for our good. Any thoughts against God are from satan and it is folly to walk in his ways.

We know that satan and sin and death have already been defeated by Jesus through His work on the cross. He is glorified in this. Although evil continues to exist, it is only through its dying gasps. Satan has lost, Jesus has won; praise be to the all-powerful God of the universe.

It is in Jesus’s name we pray these things

Amen