

August 8, 2020

Hello Brethren,

This week we received letters from two different people asking, in essence, the same question: Why did God allow Satan to be on earth and have access to humanity to deceive and create problems? Wouldn't it have been so much easier without him here?

Looking at their question at face value, we'd all have to agree that yes indeed, it would be simpler if God had chosen to bind Satan and not allow him any access to men. But then again, I suspect we all realize why He didn't choose to do it that way.

As hard as Satan tries to deceive, discourage, tempt and confuse people, God always uses his best efforts at evil and makes them serve a good purpose for men. But how does that work?

In both answers I referenced a man who lifts weights on a regular basis. In the US there are people who go to a gym perhaps daily, many of them just to use the weights. In Africa I've seen a couple of homemade bench press benches with a bar of some kind (maybe an old axle) and pieces of iron or even concrete on the ends of the bar. Homemade or not, they are all for the same purpose. By working against the resistance of the weight, the muscles are stressed, and over time grow stronger.

The medical term for this is "muscle hypertrophy", and it describes a process where the muscle fibers sustain damage, actually small tears, from being worked hard (which is part of the reason we get sore when we overwork a muscle). Since God designed our bodies to repair themselves, they go to work on the muscle, repairing it by adding muscle fiber to the tears. This process gradually increases both the size and the strength of the muscles.

Resistance is required, and the stronger a muscle gets, the more resistance is required to achieve greater results. So when a man starts out he may only be able to work with lighter weights, not even being able to lift the heavy ones. But with time and consistent work he begins to use heavier and heavier weights – and barring other problems, his muscles grow larger as well as stronger.

God takes advantage of the same principle with us spiritually. We can learn the Laws of God and the behavior He expects from each of us. But making changes to eliminate what is sinful is difficult – because we fight against the momentum of our human nature, the examples of peers and those around us, and of course the influence of Satan. Even after a habit is changed, we may occasionally face a strong temptation to fall back into an old pattern. Why? Because there is a being who works tirelessly to throw every possible temptation in our path!

I recently read a short little blog post about virtue. The author's point was "virtue isn't virtue till it's tested." And he made a good point: character (or virtue as he put it) is only solidified after we face resistance to give in ... but don't!

In fact, in this short blog he makes a passing statement that I think deserves a little more attention: “Values don’t become virtues until they are tested.” That statement sheds light on the behavior of a lot of people. People who hold certain behavioral values in their minds, standards of behavior of what is right and what is wrong. They often can clearly articulate their values, but their behavior does not always conform to the values they claim to have.

In Hebrews 12 we are reminded to look to the example of Jesus Christ “who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself...” (verse 3). He faced a great deal of resistance, and yet He never wavered from His values. Going on in this passage we read: “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges ever son whom He receives.’*” (verses 4-6).

Try as he might to destroy us, God uses the efforts of Satan instead like weights, to provide resistance for us. We suffer small tears from time to time, and no doubt our spiritual muscles get sore. But from this process we grow, getting stronger – and able to shoulder greater weight to grow into mature sons and daughters of God.

The questions written in to the Church were valid questions, and I’m sure very sincere questions! But the answer requires some perspective, and a recognition that God is always working to provide exactly what we need – even if that means trials, challenges and difficulties. Those things provide the resistance we need to work against.

A vital key is what Paul wrote in Galatians 6:9 “*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*”

Keep working against the resistance in our lives. And remember, values don’t become virtues until they are tested.

Tomorrow we will be in Van Buren for morning services, and then travel up to Bentonville for afternoon services. I hope you all have a very good Sabbath!

Best regards,

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