

Resist Satan

Why is our struggle with sin such a hard thing? It needn't be so, if we recognize who we're dealing with and arm ourselves with the right motivation.

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7).

“Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith . . .” (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

*“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:11,13).*



The common theme that links all these passages is the ongoing battle against Satan that every one of us must fight. Curiously, all three writers use the same Greek word to describe the intensity of this struggle: *anthistēmi*, meaning “to stand against, oppose.” In the New Testament the word is usually translated “resist,” although in Eph. 6:13 it is rendered “withstand.” Other translations capture the sense with a more militaristic “stand your ground” (NIV, Weymouth). In fact, the word was used in ancient times to describe an army arrayed in battle formation against an attacking enemy.

The fact that three New Testament writers all use the same strong word to describe our conflict with sin should tell something about the nature of the struggle we're in. This is a fight to the death, and we'd better get serious about it.

But in a culture that laughs at sin as an archaic concept from a more primitive age, it's hard for us to appreciate the threat that Satan poses to our wellbeing. Perhaps this is why so many of us are losing our battle with temptation. It's not “cool” to believe in Satan or sin or moral duty, so we look for a way to avoid the problem without directly confronting it. We try to dance around sin, negotiate with it, or finesse a compromise without embracing it (we think). But the one thing we are not doing is *fighting* it with a mind to defeat it. That timid strategy never works for an army on the battlefield—and it never works in dealing with Satan's efforts to destroy our lives.

The alcoholic will always find some reason why his drinking problem is not really a problem. The brash young co-ed who bounces from one broken relationship to another is quick to assign blame to all her ex-boyfriends but cannot recognize her own contribution to the blowups. Husbands and wives play the same game, but with much higher stakes, using a variety of tactics to undermine and belittle each other, oblivious to the fact that they are being used as pawns in Satan's grand strategy to destroy their marriage and lives of their children. In every case, Satan has found some character flaw, some strong appetite, and has exploited it to maximum effect—and the individuals involved are blind to the *real* enemy within themselves. Improvements will come only when they realize the foothold that Satan has gained in their own hearts and take drastic action to drive the invader out.

This struggle is not one we can win on our own. If we approach Satan's threat with the idea that it's about our own self-discipline, we will likely fail. Even if we make progress in rooting out some bad habits, Satan can use that very self-confidence as a gateway to inject *pride* into our heart—yet another back door through which he can wreak havoc in our life. So the first step in resisting Satan is to humbly cast our self on the mercy of God, pleading for His help.

A final thought: The enemy is Satan, not the sinners around us. We do not advance the Lord's cause by viciously attacking others whom Satan already has in his grasp. In that case, all we are doing is shoving the sinner deeper into the mouth of the lion. We must deal with the failures of others with gentleness, compassion, and love—and save our best ammo for the devil within.

— David King