

The hardest part of love is not, "How do I love?"; it's wanting to love in the first place, and then having the energy to do it. It takes energy to love, energy that we don't often have.

Paul Miller, *When Love Walked Among Us*

Lesson Eight: Opposition and Obstacles on the Way

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A. A Few Opponents of Kingdom and Mission

1. Supernatural Spiritual Opposition

"There are two equal & opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, & to feel an excessive & unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, & hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

There's a war going on...

Daniel 10

"We would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs."
(2 Corinthians 2:11)

Ephesians 6

"Spiritual warfare isn't part of the Christian life. Spiritual warfare *is* the Christian life."

2. Human Opposition

1 Corinthians 5:1-13 (You really are supposed to be around pagans, *and* try to pursue holiness in the church)

1 Corinthians 10

Revelation 2-3

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are the key areas of concern in these passages? How do we "combat" them?

Worth Fighting For, worth fighting over

John Stott: (1) Christians have to fight over doctrine. (2) They should hate doing so. (3) An attraction to theological or spiritual disagreement is a pathology.

B. A Few Obstacles

1. Sin

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is nothing good in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent; according to Your promises declared unto men in Christ Jesus our Lord. Grant that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life; to the glory of His name. Amen

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

GROUP DISCUSSION: What are some of the consequences of NOT “fighting”?

2. Pride

“Sacrifices you are pleased with are humble and contrite heart.” **Psalm 51. Luke 18,** which one gets justified?

Humility is important (1) because it’s HONEST, and puts you in touch with reality; and (2) it’s the best antidote to pride.

3. Idols

A. Definition of idolatry:

“an attack on God’s exclusive rights to our love, trust and obedience.”

In the Bible “idolatry” was not limited to opposition to images, because our love, trust, and obedience run to principles and gods whether they have an idol or not. Moreover, idolatry is dangerous because it almost always involves the offer of good things as substitutes for God. Chris Wright highlights power and security, success and popularity, and possessions. Tim Keller similarly highlights money, sex, and power, noting that even churches and efforts in ministry can become idols. Idols become MASTERS. Can demand *everything of you*. And enslave you. And beat you up if you don’t perform.

“All humans have been created to be reflecting beings, and they will reflect whatever they are ultimately committed to, whether the true God or some other object in the created order. Thus ... we resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration.”

“...their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”
(Psalm 115:4-8)

(cf. Ps. 135:18). Throughout the OT this theological principle leads prophets to taunt Israel’s enemies or Israel herself: they are just as blind, deaf, mute, and hard-hearted as their lifeless wood and metal gods, for those who worship gods will mirror their traits.

Atargatis, the ‘Syrian Goddess,’ was a demanding mistress. For one thing, her priests (the galli) could win their way into her affections only by emasculating themselves.

According to the *De Dea Syria*, attributed to Lucian of Samosata, any young man disposed to dedicate himself to her service in Hierapolis had to make

this first and most extravagant oblation on one of her high holy days, in a fit of divine ecstasy, with a single economic slash of a sacred sword kept at her temple.

After this surgery the new priest “would run naked and bleeding through the city streets until he found a home into which he felt inspired to fling the freshly severed jetsam. Any household thus “honored” was then required by religious decency to supply the new initiate with female attire and adornments.

Now, admittedly, we all do our best to lay up treasure in heaven, and I suppose one ought not to cast too many peremptory judgments on to other people’s pieties; but I think most of us can agree that this was a fairly exorbitant sum to place in escrow on an uncertain bargain.

Closer to home geographically, ideologically and temporally, we find the same effect. The most famous “graven image” in the United States is the Statue of Liberty. Many Americans are unaware that the image atop the base is the Roman goddess Libertas.

Now we may not worship this goddess in the traditional manner. But it is not too much to say that our radical allegiance to self and independence is idolatrous worship, nor that such worship manifests itself in extravagant offerings of money spent and relationships sacrificed—even the sacrifice of the unborn. And if we worship freedom, we may become the personification of Libertas, unable to experience healthy dependence on God and others, even as others find they cannot depend on us. Freedom can ironically enslave us, crippling our service to God and others.

All sin is really a subset of idolatry

4. Sex and Romance

I’m important, my needs and desires are paramount. I need VALUE. But for thousands of years, sex was always tied to creation of images of God. Stands in HIS SERVICE before it stands in your own.

Genesis 1:26-28

Proverbs 7-8

Isaiah 1:21a

Ezekiel 16, 23

Hosea

Romans 1

5. Money

The antidote: _____.

Abraham Kuyper: "Jesus turns against Money the moment it tries to act as a power that does not stand in the service of the Lord."

C. A Few Weapons

(1) Fasting

"Fasting is the body talking what the spirit yearns, what the soul longs for, and what the mind knows to be true." Scot McKnight

(2) Worship

Enthroned on the praises of his people... Psalm 22:3 (literally, "...sits on the praises of his people...")

(3) Prayer

(4) The Life of the Mind

"If a man is offered a fact which goes against his instincts, he will scrutinize it closely, and unless the evidence is overwhelming, he will refuse to believe it. If, on the other hand, he is offered something which affords a reason for acting in accordance to his instincts, he will accept it even on the slightest evidence." - Bertrand Russell

"take everything thought captive..."

Especially (a) thoughts about God

And (b) God's kingdom; Matt 6:33

And (c) thoughts about self.

25% of American high school students thought their "ability to get along with others" was "in the top 1 per cent"; 94% of college professors thought they were doing a "better-than-avg job"

(5) Missions

"The Other Lord's Prayer"

(6) Evangelism

And we start with ourselves, learning again and again to believe the gospel