

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	90		Gary L.W. Johnson
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KEEP THEM FROM THE EVIL ONE

In Hamlet's famous soliloquy – you know, the one that begins with that well-known phrase, “To be, or not to be: that is the question” – Shakespeare captures humanity's innate fear of death: “To grunt and sweat under a weary life, But that the dread of something after death, The undiscover'd country from whose bourn No traveler returns, puzzles the will, And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”¹ We are all by nature afraid of death. We may pretend otherwise, but deep down there is a very real fear of death. Why is this so? In 1 Corinthians 15:56, Paul tells us plainly that *the sting of death is sin* – it is sin that brings death and it is sin that causes us to greatly fear death. This is Hamlet's fear: “something *after* death.” Try as we might to dismiss this fear, to comfort ourselves with the insane belief that there is no God, or the naïve belief that He is so genial there is no need to worry about sin and judgment – the haunting fear persists. Hebrews 9:7 plainly tells us that after death comes judgment. “But there is sin, and man has a feeling within him that death is not the end, and that he goes on to meet God in judgment. He knows he is guilty, so he is afraid. Even though he has not much knowledge of theology, instinctively he is afraid.”² Most of the time the lyrics in popular music are either overtly sentimental and expressly romantic or downright inane. However, occasionally some of them make profound statements about life. Frank Sinatra's well-known song, “My Way” (1969), captures in the minds of many an outlook on life that fails to see beyond the grave.

*“And now, the end is near / And so I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear / I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full / I traveled each and ev'ry highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.*

*“Regrets, I've had a few / But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do, I saw it through without exemption
I planned each charted course, each careful step along the highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.*

*“Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew / When I bit off more than I could chew
And through it all, when there was doubt / I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way.*

*“I've loved, I've laughed and cried / I've had my fill, my share of losing
And now, as tears subside, I find it all so amusing / To think I did all that
And may I say, not in a shy way, / ‘Oh, no, oh, no, not me, I did it my way.’*

*“For what is a man, what has he got? / If not himself, then he has naught
The right to say the things he feels and not the words of one who kneels
The record shows, I took the blows, and did it my way!”*

Another song recorded that same year was Roy Clark's "Yesterday When I Was Young. It is far more self-reflective, and even has a confessional ring to it.

*"Seems the love I've known has always been / The most destructive kind
Yes, that's why now I feel so old / Before my time.*

*"Yesterday when I was young / The taste of life was sweet as rain upon my tongue.
I teased at life as if it were a foolish game, / The way the evening breeze may tease a candle flame.
The thousand dreams I dreamed, the splendid things I planned
I'd always built to last on weak and shifting sand.
I lived by night and shunned the naked light of the day
And only now I see how the years ran away.*

*"Yesterday the moon was blue / And every crazy day brought something new to do.
I used my magic age as if it were a wand / And never saw the waste and emptiness beyond.
The game of love I played with arrogance and pride
And every flame I lit too quickly, quickly died.
The friends I made all seemed somehow to drift away
And only I am left on stage to end the play.*

*"There are so many songs in me that won't be sung / I feel the bitter taste of tears upon my tongue.
The time has come for me to pay for / Yesterday when I was young."*

Sinatra's song sounds heroic but it is actually an anthem of stoic defiance. Clark's song, while more searching, echoes a nihilistic tone that ends in despair. In neither song is there any hint of redemption or the need for salvation. The great Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) captured the essence of sinful humanity's condition in a narrative where he imagines a man trying to run away from his own shadow, and ever and again he turns round, and it is still there, that black thing, dogging him; on and on, flinging himself wildly away from it – and round again, and it is still there; and he is panting now, and tired: "God, God, I can't get away from it! I can't!" Carlyle has depicted the awful reality of our sin, always with us and always, always reminding us of the horror that Hamlet dreaded – "something after death." Christ has conquered death because He has conquered sin. What, then, should be the Christian's attitude to death? It is still an enemy, unnatural, unpleasant, and undignified – in fact, *the last enemy to be destroyed*. Yet, it is a defeated enemy. Because Christ has taken away our sins, death has lost its power to harm and therefore to terrify. Jesus summed it up in one of His greatest affirmations: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die* (1 Corinthians 15:26; John 11:25, 26). That is, Jesus is the resurrection of believers who die, and the life of the believers who live. His promise to the former is *you will live*, meaning not just that you will survive, but that you will be resurrected. His promise to the latter is *you will never die*, meaning not that you will escape death, but that death will prove to be a trivial episode, a transition to fullness of life.³ What does this have to do with our text in John 17? Everything. Christ's prayer for his apostles – that they be preserved and consecrated -- directly involved them being kept from the evil one. How so? If they are *not* protected from the work of the devil, they will be deceived, and their commission will be compromised. If the devil succeeds in thwarting the great commission, the work of consecration/sanctification will be rendered null and void.

I. **THE EVIL ONE.** Hendriksen frames the matter in this way. "What he does request is this, that the Father keep the disciples *from the evil one*, or *from evil*. Both translations are possible. We prefer the former, for the following reasons:

(1) Again and again, during this night, Jesus has spoken about Satan, the prince of this world (12:31; 13:27; 14:30; 16:11): that he would be cast out; that he had entered into Judas; that he was on his way; and that he had been judged. Judas had fallen a prey to the evil one. Why,

then, is it unreasonable to suppose that Jesus would pray that the others might be protected against the wiles of Satan?

- (2) 1 John 5:18 is, to a certain extent, a parallel passage. Here the keeping has as its result, that *the evil one* does not touch the man who is born of God.
- (3) It is almost impossible to suppose that Jesus, in speaking of *keeping* his (and the Father's) own, was not thinking of the allegory of the shepherd watching over and guarding his sheep. Hence, 10:29 ("and *no one* is able to snatch it out of the hand of the Father") occurs to the mind immediately. Now the enemy referred to in 10:29 is definitely personal; it is not just evil in general, but Satan, the false prophet, the persecutor, etc. Hence, also here in 17:15 we think of the evil one, Satan.
- (4) The fact that back of all sinister influences stands Satan himself, so that it is especially against *him* that the believer needs protection is the prevailing New Testament view (both in the teaching of Jesus and in that of the apostles); see in addition to the passages listed under (1) and (2) above, also: Matt. 4:1; 13:19, 38, 39; John 8:44; 13:2; Acts 5:3; 2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 2:2; 4:27; 6:11, 12; 1 Thess. 2:18; Jas. 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8; Rev. 12:3; 20:2."⁴

II. **THE WORK OF THE EVIL ONE.** The Lord had spoken of the evil one (Matt. 13:19), not as a sinister influence, but as a person, and the Epistles bear this out in frequent passages. The apostle Paul assures the church at Thessalonica that God would guard them "from the evil one" (2 Thess. 3:3). The apostle John speaks of him five times thus and says in the closing passage of his first epistle, in words which re-echo the Lord's, "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not (present continuous tense, "doth not go on doing sin"); but He that was begotten of God (i.e., the Son of God, 4:9) keepeth him (R.V.), and the evil one toucheth him not. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:18, 19). The preposition "from" in "from the evil one" is *ek*, out of, and is used of deliverance from persons, e.g., Acts 26:17."⁵ While he does not exercise totally free rein over men because of divinely imposed limitations and restraints (see Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt. 12:29; Rev. 20:2-3), Satan is said nonetheless to rage against men (Rev. 12:12), to prowl around like a roaring lion looking to devour the sons of men (1 Pet. 5:8), to work in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2), to blind the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4), to turn men away from God to serve him (1 Tim. 5:15), to take men captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26), to deceive the nations (Rev. 12:9; 20:3, 7), to sow tares in the field of the world (Matt. 13:25), to obstruct world missions (1 Thess. 2:18), to masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), to make war against the saints (Rev. 12:17), to throw Christians into prison (Rev. 2:10), to oppress with physical and mental illness (Acts 10:38), to lie and murder (John 8:44), and to hold (under God) the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Specifically, it was Satan who tempted Adam to sin (Gen. 3:1-5), who accused Job of serving God for profit (Job 1-2), and who afflicted him with physical and mental anguish (Job 2:7), who desired the body of Moses (Jude 9), who incited David to sin (1 Chron. 21:1), who accused Joshua the high priest of sin (Zech. 3:1), who tempted Jesus to sin (Matt. 4:11), who crippled a woman for eighteen years (Luke 13:11, 16), who incited Peter to oppose Jesus' approaching death (Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33), who requested permission to sift Peter as wheat (Luke 22:31), who put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ (John 13:2) and who then entered into Judas (John 13:27), who filled Ananias's heart to lie against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), and who tormented Paul with a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7).⁶

CONCLUSION: Richard Gilpin (1625-1700) in his classic work on *Satan's Temptations*, wrote: "Next to Satan's deceits in tempting to sin and against duty, his design of *corrupting the minds of men by error* calls for our search; and indeed this is one of his principal endeavours, which takes up a considerable part of his time and diligence. He is not only called in Scripture an *unclean spirit*, but also a *lying spirit* [1 Kings 22:22], and there are none of these cursed qualifications that lie idle in him. As by his uncleanness we may easily conjecture his attempts upon the will and affections to defile them by lust; so by his lying we may conclude that he will certainly strive . . . blind the understanding by error . . . Truth is a ray and beam of him who is

the Father of lights. All revealed truths are but copies and transcripts of that essential, archetypal truth. Truth is the rod of his strength, Ps. ex. 2, the sceptre of his kingdom, but which he doth subdue the hearts of men to his obedience and service in conversion. Truth is that rock upon which he hath built his church, the foundations are the prophets and apostles, Eph. 2:20 – that is, the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Truth is that great *depositum* committed to the care of his church, which is therefore called the pillar of truth, 1 Tim. 3:15; because as princes or rulers put their proclamations on pillars for the better information of their subjects, so doth his church hold out truth to the world. Holiness is maintained by truth, our ways are directed by it, and by it are we forewarned of Satan’s devices, John 17:17. Now the prince of darkness carrying himself in as full an opposition to the God of truth as he can in all his ways, God’s interest in truth will sufficiently discover the devil’s design to promote error; for such is his hatred of God, that, though he cannot destroy truth, no more than he can tear the sun out of the firmament, yet he will endeavour by corrupting the copy to disgrace the original. Though he cannot break Christ’s sceptre, yet by raising error he would hinder the increase of his subjects; though he cannot remove the rock upon which the church is built, he will endeavour to shake it, or to interrupt the building, and to tear down God’s proclamation from the pillar on which he hath set it to be read of all; and if we can conceive what a hatred the thief hath to the light, as it contradicts and hinders his designs, we may imagine there is nothing against which the devil will use greater contrivances than against the light of truth. He neither can nor will make a league with any, but upon the terms that Nahash propounded to the men of Jabesh-Gilead – that is, that he may *put out their right eye*, and so *lay it for a reproach upon the Israel of God*, 1 Sam. 11:3. It is the work of the Holy Spirit *to lead us into truth*, and by the rule of contraries it is the devil’s work to lead into error.”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ Hamlet, Act III, Scene I in *The Works of William Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 688.

² D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *I Am Not Ashamed, Advice to Timothy* (Baker, 1986), p. 104.

³ As cited in J. R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* IVP, 1986), p. 240.

⁴ Wm. Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John: New Testament Commentary* (Baker Book House, 1967), p. 360.

⁵ W. E. Vine, *Expository Commentary on John* (rpt. Nelson, 1997), p. 194.

⁶ R. L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), p. 559.

⁷ Richard Gilpin, *Daemonologia Sacra: A Treatise of Satan Temptations* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), p. 127.