

Overcoming sin... the Battlefield of the Mind

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman's sermon discusses the internal battle against sin and the importance of making conscious choices to overcome negative influences in our lives.

Scripture: Proverbs 23:7, Luke 11:34, Romans 8:6, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 2:2, Philipians 4:8, James 4:7, 1 Peter 2:11

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Overcoming Sin"

Description

Shane Idleman emphasizes the gradual descent into sin, where the enemy deceives by masking the long-term consequences with temporary pleasures, leading individuals astray one compromise at a time. He highlights the internal battle between our sinful nature and the Spirit's desires, stressing the importance of recognizing and addressing this conflict. Idleman uses the analogy of two dogs fighting within us, symbolizing good and evil, and underscores the significance of feeding the right 'dog' through our choices and thoughts. He warns against the influence of media and entertainment on our minds, urging listeners to be vigilant in what they consume as it shapes their thoughts and actions, ultimately affecting their spiritual well-being.

Transcript

The enemy rarely pushes us off the cliff, so to speak. We're often led down one step at a time, one compromise at a time, one wrong choice at a time. For example, the enemy doesn't show a young couple the pain and anguish and the years of regret that an abortion brings; he deceives them with the temporary enjoyment of premarital sex and a false sense of freedom from responsibility. If the full story was known beforehand, no doubt different choices might have been made. We're often not shown the pain that sin brings, we're enticed by the temporary pleasure.

Galatians 5:17 says that the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what our sinful nature desires, and that these two forces are constantly fighting against each other. As a result, our choices are rarely free from this conflict. In other words, our sinful nature and our new nature in Christ are constantly at war. Don't be alarmed. The fact that there is a fight confirms the value of our commitment.

A paraphrase of, The Battle Within, illustrates this truth: "A young man, determined to find help for his troubled life, walked to a neighboring church. He told the pastor that his life was meaningless and in constant turmoil. He wanted to make better choices, but couldn't.

He described the conflict: "It's as if I have two dogs constantly battling within me. One dog is evil, while the other is good. The battles are long and difficult; they drain me emotionally and mentally." Without a moment's thought, the pastor asked, "Which dog wins the battles?" Hesitantly, the young man admitted, "The evil dog." The pastor looked at him and said, "That's the one you feed the most. You need to starve that dog to death!"

The pastor realized, as should we, that the source of our strength comes from the food that we choose. What we feed grows, and what grows becomes the dominating force within our lives. Sin never stands still--it either grows or withers depending on whether you feed or starve it.

Which dog wins the battle in your mind? Proverbs 23:7 says, "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." And Jesus said that the lamp of the body is the eye. When your eye is good your body will be full of light. When your eye is bad your body will be full of darkness. (Refer to Luke 11:34.) Our thoughts become words, our words become actions, our actions become habits. Who is shaping your thoughts? A daily diet of violence, lust, anger, and depression will fuel those very things in your life.

One of the reasons why men and women struggle with lust or anger is because they feed those emotions continually throughout the day. It's difficult to avoid illicit sex and outbursts of anger while continually watching movies and TV programs that promote them. As a matter of fact, many cases of sexual violence can be traced directly back to pornography. What we embrace eventually embraces us. "The more we follow that which is good, the faster and the further we shall flee from that which is evil" (Matthew Henry).

Some may say that being cautious with what we view and listen to borders on legalism (e.g., performance-based religion). Although it can when taken to extremes, I disagree. Entertainment is not merely entertainment; depending on how it's used, it can be a very destructive influence. The Bible reveals that the devil is the prince of this world (Ephesians 2:2); therefore, you should pay close attention to what you watch and listen to--the force controlling it ultimately controls you. Romans 8:6 says that if our sinful nature controls our mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls our mind, there is life and peace. With God's help, you'll begin to control your thoughts instead of allowing your thoughts to control you.

For those who are skeptical about the media's influence, consider why companies spend millions of dollars on commercials. They obviously understand the concept of "suggestive selling."

In the end, the choice is yours when it comes to what you watch and listen to, but why would you willingly walk into the enemy's camp? Why would you feed wrong desires and thoughts when they do nothing but war against the soul.

If you're questioning God's existence, experiencing violent bursts of anger, struggling with addiction or lust, or continually feeling depressed or discouraged, evaluate your diet of television, movies, the Internet, music, friends, and your thoughts in general. Are they lifting you up, or pulling you down? There is no middle ground--you're being influenced one way or the other. Are there any changes that need to be made in your life? If so, this is where you start to win the battle within.

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