

# THE BATTLE OF SELF

*By John Gagliardi*



We have been looking at battles the Kingdom business professional faces, and while there is certainly no shortage of battles, one of the most persistent and difficult we face is the battle of self.

The Bible says that the human heart is both wicked and deceitful (Jeremiah 17: 10), and whether we like it or not, part of the condition of being human. We are made in God's image, but we retain enough of the old, unregenerate nature to make the battle against self – our "flesh" – a major daily grind.

Each morning when we wake up and look in the mirror, there is the battle staring right back at us. Even as great a man as Paul cried out in despair at the gargantuan task of taming the flesh... "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh ... wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7: 18, 24)

So if Paul had trouble dealing with self, then we can feel a little happier that we face the same battle. When we are born again, our spirit is renewed, and we are a "new creation". (2 Corinthians 5: 17) But for the rest of our "self" – body and soul (mind, will and emotions) – we have an ongoing, lifetime job to "capture" it and bring in into obedience to Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 10: 5)

We are led astray mainly by three things – the world, the devil, and our own flesh. And in my experience, part of the Adamic nature we all carry makes us want to blame anything and everything except ourselves. Right back in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, their first reaction was to blame someone else.

Eve said in effect, "the devil made me do it" (familiar?), and then Adam blamed Eve. Neither of them blamed their own selfishness and fallen nature.

Sure, the serpent tempted them – but he didn't get the apple or whatever sort of fruit it was, and shove it down their throats. Their hands were not tied behind their backs. They chose to reach out, open their mouths, and pop it in!

Everything in life is a choice – and where we are today is the sum total of the choices, both large and small, that we have made during our life up to this point. There is a devil, and he is a bad devil – but there is also a God, and He is a good God. We can choose whom to listen to and obey!

When we were created, God gave us free will – the power of choice. And it is a truly awesome power – we have the power to choose our ultimate destiny. God will not force us to obey Him – we have to choose to obey Him.

And while the devil is very real, prowling around like a lion looking for a tasty morsel (1 Peter 5: 8), the Bible also tells us that if we resist him, he will bolt for cover like the craven coward he really is! (James 4: 7). Again – our choice!

So what are some of the things we fight against, when we talk of the “battle of self”? Here are a few to think about:

- Self-exaltation or pride – the worst, original sin (Ezekiel 28: 15), that comes in so many and varied forms, ranging from simply vanity, all the way through to full-on rebellion against the Word of God; it is the opposite of humility (James 4: 10), and of course, as we all know, it “goeth before a fall” (Proverbs 16: 18)
- Self-indulgence or greed – lack of self-discipline in eating and drinking, and also putting yourself first, the exact opposite of what Jesus tells us in the Gospels, and so well described by Paul: “...They are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite ...who set their mind on earthly things,” (Philippians 3: 18 and 19) and the “practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4: 19)
- Self-righteousness – a special form of pride, seen and condemned by Jesus Himself in the proud scribes, Pharisees and priests of His day (Luke 18: 9-14), and sitting around us today in church pews feeling superior to the “sinners” and most of the rest of mankind
- Self-will or stubbornness – God many times in the Old Testament condemns the Israelites for being stubborn and “stiff-necked” (Exodus 33: 3; Deuteronomy 9: 6); God wants us pliable, soft and teachable – clay in the Master Potter's hands (Isaiah 64: 8), and if we will not allow ourselves to be moulded and shaped by Him, we are an “unfruitful vessel” or even “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (Romans 9: 21 and 22)
- Selfishness – like the “rich young ruler” in Matthew 19: 16-22, who loved material things and his opulent lifestyle too much to listen to Jesus and take hold of eternal life; selfishness is a fixation on the here-and-now, the material things of life, instead of taking hold of the “true riches” of heaven; it is an astounding delusion, because the selfish person puts himself first and grabs for the “steak on the plate”, denying himself or herself an infinitely greater reward (Romans 15: 1-4)

The answer to the battle of self is also tied up with self – self-denial or self-sacrifice. Jesus makes it very clear, that if we are to find our real life, we have to lose the selfish, self-centred life – take up our cross, and follow Him (Matthew 10: 38 and 39).

The amazing paradox of the Christian life is exactly that – to find our life, we have to be prepared to lose it. It is the great principle of sowing and reaping – we have to sow our life, in order to take up a new and

better life in Christ. Whatever we want – money, friends, respect, love – we have to sow it first, in order to reap it. (Galatians 6: 7)

A good example is the story of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17: 8-16. We all know the story well – Elijah comes to the poor widow and asks for bread. She has only enough for one more meal for herself and her son, yet, maybe somehow sensing the powerful principles of Godly increase, she gives Elijah what little she has.

She sowed in all she had – bread for just one day – but she reaped enough bread to last until the drought ended, and rain came, some three years later. She sowed in her food for one day, but reaped food for over 1000 days, a good example of the 1000-fold return the Bible talks about in Deuteronomy 1: 11.

As Kingdom business professionals, we have a lot to learn from the principle of sowing and reaping, as we battle daily with self. We must be prepared to die to self, before we can truly live - - but like a seed, if we do allow ourselves to die to Christ, to be “sown”, we will be raised up as a great harvest, multiplied and increased, and ready to do “mighty exploits” in the marketplace and beyond for our God. (Mark 4: 26-29)