

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *When Materialism Consumes*.

Introduction: The Greek goddess of victory was Nike. The Greek word *Nike* means victory. John used this word in 1 John 5:4, "This is the victory (the *Nike*) that has overcome the world: our faith" (1 John 5:4). Who doesn't want to be victorious whether it is in athletics, business, politics, or life itself?

Being a Christian is about being victorious, too. A Christian is winning over our enemy. When we became a Christian, by placing our faith alone in Jesus Christ for our salvation, we joined God's team. Our name is on his roster. His name is on our jersey. We are a part of his squad, one of his players. Being on God's teams grants us many wonderful benefits while playing on this planet and some out of this world benefits when we retire to heaven. As beautiful as that is, we entered into a battle, a game of monumental proportions, a war, if you will, against a powerful opponent when we joined God's team.

1. Our enemy is Satan. (2:12-14)

Who is our opponent? Who is our enemy? John identified him as the evil one. "I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one" (1 John 2:13, 14). Our enemy is Satan, the evil one. He is the personification of evil and all that is opposed to God, including God's people.

As our enemy, Satan operates as the ultimate terrorist. He is the lesser power that uses every available tactic to win the battles. He does not fight fair. He uses anything and everything that he can to bring us down. A Texas politician was asked why a particular candidate had lost an election. "It happened because he forgot the first rule of knife fighting: There are no rules." With Satan, there are no rules. He fights as a guerrilla, using everything and anything to gain an advantage and to win a battle. He is a liar, a deceiver, a diabolical masquerader who comes to us in a thousand guises, tempting us to disobey the Lord.

2. Our fight is in the world. (2:15-17)

Where is this war fought? John identified the location of the battle: Our contest is in the world. John used the term *world* five times in these verses. The word *world* in the New Testament has at least three different meanings. It sometimes means the physical world, the earth. It also means the human world, the people. But here it means the invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ. We often use the term *world* in the sense of a system when we refer to the world of sports or the world of finance or the world of politics. We know that in such worlds there is an organized system, made up of a set of ideas, people, activities, and purposes. Behind what we see, in the world of sports or finance or politics, is an invisible system that we cannot see; but it is the system that keeps things going.

In like manner, the world that John is referring to is an invisible spiritual system, opposing the work of God on earth. This system is under the control of the evil one. John wrote, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31 NIV). Satan has an organization of evil spirits working with him to influence the affairs of the world.

Just so we are clear, Christians live in the physical world. We are members of the human world. But we do not belong to the spiritual world that is Satan's system for opposing God. The old saying is true for believers, "We are in the world, but not of the world." It is an unnatural habitat for believers in much the same way water is not our natural habitat.

A Christian cannot help being in the world, but when the world (the invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ) is in the Christian, trouble starts. How does one know that they have been seduced by Satan and fallen for the world's system? Simple. We begin to love the world more than we love the father. We lose the enjoyment of the Father's love and the desire to do the Father's will. The Bible has become boring, and prayer is a difficult chore. Even Christian fellowship seems empty and disappointing. Furthermore, we begin to take on the nature and character of the world. We watch things we shouldn't view. We gossip. We lie. We seek to get even when someone hurts us. And, a thousand other sins. We justify it by saying, "But that is how it's done in the world." But, Christians are not of the world. We operate under a different system?

3. Our attack comes from three fronts. (2:16)

The world system attacks on three fronts to defeat Christians. John identified that Satan will use three primary strategies to defeat believers in this war:

- "the lust of the flesh." This is the passion or strong desire to accomplish natural desires unnaturally. Its mantra is: If it feels good, do it. God has given us certain desires which are good, such as hunger, thirst, sleep, and sex. Nothing is wrong with eating, drinking, sleeping, or sexual expression in the bonds of marriage. But when the flesh nature controls them, these things can become sinful "lusts."
- "the lust of the eyes." While eyesight is a precious gift, our eyes, however, are often the means by which sinful desires are introduced to the mind. Its mantra is: If I see it, I will have it. The eyes are the window to the soul, the gateway to the mind. This is why the Psalmist advised: "I will set before my eyes no vile thing" (Psalm 101:3 NIV).
- "The pride in one's possessions." This is the personal boasting, selfish arrogance, and public pretense that fails to realize our dependence on God. Its mantra is: If I got it, I would flaunt it. Here Satan convinces us to make idols of our livelihood, social standing, and status symbols. He has us if we think we are better than someone else.

4. Our victory is secure. (2:13-14)

How do we overcome the enemy? John identified that believers have already defeated the evil one. The word *overcome* is a favorite with John. The word *overcome* is the verb form of *Nike*. John is not describing a particular class of believers. Instead, John is using the word *overcomer* as a name for one who is being a Christian. He is saying that a believer routs the evil one. A believer crushes the world, this invisible spiritual system that opposes everything good and of God. A believer doesn't give in to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

How do we do that? Here are three truths that need to be employed daily to secure our victory over the enemy.

A. We don't just read the Bible, we use the Bible. (2:14)
God's Word is the only offensive weapon the Bible talks about to defeat Satan. Remember how Jesus used the word in his battle with Satan in the desert. Each time Satan attacked, Jesus responded with the words, "It is written" and then quoted scripture. The Bible's power never diminishes, never wears out, and never goes dormant.

B. We don't just seek God's will, we live God's will. (2:17)
When we live in the center of God's will, doing what we already know to be true, we discover the empty imitations of Satan counterfeits that he tries to offer through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We soon discover that the world's system that opposes God is faulty, flawed, and futile. God's will, on the other hand, is abundant, eternal, and permanent.

C. We don't just say we love, we make sacrifices. (3:16)
John illustrated the supreme example of love: the sacrifice of Jesus. *Laid down* involves a deliberate, willful act that demonstrated his love for us. Love is a matter of the will rather than the emotion.

John said that Christian love is practical. Christian love always expresses itself in action. John contrasted *words* versus *actions*. To love in word means merely to talk about a need, but to love in action means to do something about meeting that need. Christian love doesn't just say, "I love you," it gets its hands dirty, its feet dusty, and its heart engaged.

Rick Ezell is a pastor and writer, living in Greenville, SC. Read more of his writing at rickezell.com.