

Chapter 3: Drawing the Battle Lines

A Topical Study

Introduction

If God has truly broken you over your sin, then he both calls you and enables you to return to him. It's time to do battle against your flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit. Are you ready to fight? As the song says, can you testify, "Compelled by joy, I fight the sin that turns my gaze from your glory"?

You may feel that this battle against pornography is daunting, but praise the Lord, Christ Jesus has not left you alone in this fight. Philippians 2:12–13 says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Both the ability and the desire to fight against sin comes from God, not from you. He is with you every step of the way. He helps you analyze the enemy, he provides you with weapons, he trains you with your fellow-soldiers, and he is your closest ally. As we draw the battle lines in your battle against lust, thank the Lord for his grace and mercy toward you!

The Nature of the Battle

Before you go rushing into battle, it is vital that you understand both your enemy and the battlefield. What may seem like a simple objective—"kill porn!"—might end up being a lot deeper than you think. There are two things about the battle you have to understand.

- **The battle has many fronts:** You may be thinking to yourself, *If I can just conquer my battle with porn, I'll be in good shape*, but chances are, there are other sins in your life, along with porn, that all have the same root sin.

In Peter Jackson's movie adaptation, *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, Thorin Oakenshield and his comrades find themselves completely outnumbered as they seek to defend the Misty Mountain. As they begin to lose hope, Thorin and his best warriors charge away from the battle toward the enemy camp where the commander of the orc armies is overlooking battlefield. When Bilbo the Hobbit and Gandalf the Wizard spot them, Bilbo asks Gandalf what they are doing. "To cut the head off the snake," Gandalf replies.

When the commander is defeated, his armies are rendered powerless. In your battle against sin, this is what you must do. Your battle has many fronts. As you examine your life, let's say that you discern four struggles: laziness, eating habits, temper, and porn. Committed to conquering your battle with porn, you gather all your forces and charge directly at pornography with everything you've got, all the while leaving your laziness, your eating habits, and your temper unaddressed. But what is the "commanding sin" behind all four struggles? Maybe it's a lack of self-control. Your surrender to your own appetites has led to a number of struggles, only *one* of which is porn. And as you attack porn, your lack of self-control simply manifests itself even greater in the other struggles, and eventually you gain victory over none of them.

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This is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:25, “Every athlete exercises self-control in **all things**,” not just one thing. Your battle against sin must attack the “commanding sin”—the one that manifests itself in multiple ways in your life. The main enemy is not pornography – it is the sinful heart that pursues pornography.

Do you see other sins in your life that might have the same root problem as your addiction to pornography? What are they? After writing down the list, see if you can find a root cause—a “commanding” sin—for all (or most) of them.

- **The battle is progressive:** You need to realize that you are starting on a journey. Change doesn’t happen overnight. So often, we adopt an unrealistic understanding of our spiritual journey that only produces greater discouragement when we fail.

Have you ever seen those signs in the workplace that say, “This department has worked _____ days without an accident. The previous record was _____ days. Let’s set a new record!” When an accident occurs the first number is erased and you start back at ZERO. We often look at our Christian life like that: *I have gone 4 whole days without looking at porn!* But when you fall back into it, you erase that number and start all over as if all your progress was for nothing and you’re back to where you started.

This isn’t how the Christian life works. Although you should grieve and repent over failure, you should also rejoice over the progress God has worked in you. When you stumble and fall in a race, you don’t go back to the starting line; you get up from where you fell and continue forward. As the Apostle Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3:12).

Have you targeted your enemy? Do you know what the root problem is? Do you know the Nature of your fight?

The Weapons for the Battle

It would be foolish to enter into battle without acquiring the proper weapons. God has given you *incredibly* powerful weapons that he wants you to use in this fight. I’m not going to make this complicated, I’m not going to say anything ground-breaking or earth shattering. What I’m about to tell you is what your Sunday school teacher told you when you were 5 years old. There are children’s songs about this, and you heard it preached all the time. There are two main weapons that every Christian possesses: **The Bible and Prayer**. In Ephesians 6, having described the Christian’s spiritual armor, he describes their spiritual weapon: “And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the **word** of God, **praying** at all times in the Spirit” (6:17–18).

You may be thinking to yourself, *it can’t be that simple! I’ve tried those! I read my Bible! I pray! Why aren’t I winning my battle against sin?* Well I can tell you right now, **it’s not because there is anything**

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wrong with your weapons. 2 Peter 1:2-4 says that God has given to us “all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” You have all the resources and all the weapons you need to defeat sin in your life. So why do we experience so much defeat? **It’s because we are unskilled with our weapons.** You know the weapon is powerful, you know the weapon is effective, but you don’t know how to use it.

Read Hebrews 5:12–14. Write down the key phrase that explains how we become experts with God’s Word.

Practice, practice, practice. Intense Bible study and prayer is not just for pastors, it’s for the Christian. A vibrant, healthy prayer life is not just the “spiritually elite,” it’s for the Christian. God designed life to only work *one way*: to give your life as a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1) in worship to God. To put it bluntly, the *only* way for you to defeat your obsession with pornography is to be *obsessed* with God, reading his Word diligently and praying constantly.

Write out some ways that you can practice using the spiritual weapons of God’s Word and prayer this week.

The Fellow Soldiers in the Battle

You are not a one-man army—God never intended or permits you to be. He has sovereignly created his church, the body of his Son, and you are called to be a part of it (Heb 10:25). God has designed it so that your struggle be fought within the context of a local church, fighting side-by-side with brothers and sisters in Christ. Unfortunately, since addiction to pornography is typically a very private sin, we try to fight against it very privately—a one-man army.

I’m not just talking about confessing your struggle to a trusted brother in the church, I’m talking about complete and total commitment to the church, making it a priority in your life. You need the church and the church needs you.

Describe briefly your current level of involvement in your local church.

Your church is the place where you can be better trained in your spiritual weaponry. It is the place where you can learn and benefit from the strengths of your fellow Christians. It is the place where you have the opportunity to use the gifts God has given you to help mature the body of Christ (Eph 4:12–13).

The church is vital, not only because God commands it, but also because it is a means by which you can conquer sin. Hebrew 3:13 commands us to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” If you consider that verse inversely, your heart will be hardened toward sin if you don’t put yourself in a position to be daily exhorted by fellow

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believers. I am not suggesting that you shout your struggle from the pulpit or publish it in the bulletin, but I am suggesting that you consider someone within your church in whom you can confide. It should be a more mature Christian with Bible knowledge and life experience.

Write down the reasons why you might be hesitant to get help from someone in the church. Then write down how you can overcome those hesitations.

The church is a non-negotiable. Isolation in your fight will only lead to frustration and defeat. Get connected, get help, get accountability. God was gracious enough to give you fellow soldiers to fight with you.

The Allies in the Battle

As I said in the beginning, you are not alone in this fight. God not only has given you the weapons, but he has also given you *himself*. And as the triune God, each of the three persons of the trinity are working for your growth and sanctification in different ways. You have God on your side!

Turn to Romans 8. This is, in my opinion, one of the most gloriously comforting chapters in all the Bible. In it, we see each member of the Godhead at work in our lives. But before we enjoy chapter 8, we need to understand Paul's flow of thought leading up to it:

- **Romans 6:** Through Christ's death and resurrection, sin has been put to death (vv. 1–11). We are no longer slaves to it (vv. 12–14), so we must not yield ourselves to sin any longer, but instead yield ourselves to righteousness (vv. 12–23).
- **Romans 7:** We have died to the law (vv. 1–6); however, there is an internal struggle between the flesh and the spirit that can be both frustrating and discouraging (vv. 7–25).
- **Romans 8:1–11:** The good news is that we are in Christ Jesus and are no longer condemned. "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit."

Having described both our battle against sin and our position in Christ, Paul describes the glorious benefits of being "in Christ." In the following verses we can see how each member of the Godhead is our ally in our fight against sin:

God the Father: Read Romans 8:15–17; 28–30. Write down what God the Father has done for you.

God the Holy Spirit: Read Romans 8:16; 26–27. Write down what God the Spirit has done for you.

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God the Son: Read Romans 8:3–4; 34–39. Write down what God the Son has done for you.

It's no wonder that in Romans 8:31, Paul exclaims, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" When you fall into sin, you can never blame your allies for failing you. You have the triune Godhead on your side! He has given you the powerful weapons of his Word and prayer! You are fully equipped to fight, not only pornography, but any sin that seeks to exalt itself in your life!

Conclusion

What a glorious God we serve! It is truly breathtaking when one considers the unmerited love that God has shown us. Why would you pursue lesser things? Why would we entertain ourselves with the very things for which Christ died? There is a battle to fight, so start your weapons training and get to know your allies. You are more than a conqueror through Christ.

Before next time

- **Read Psalm 119.** Try to describe in a paragraph how David valued God's Word.
- **Read the prayers of Paul in Ephesians 1:15–23 and 3:14–21 and ask for grace.** Pray these prayers to God for your own spiritual battle.
- **Recommended Resources:** *How to Read the Bible for All its worth*, by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart; *A Call to Prayer*, by J. C. Ryle (available on PDF online); *Finally Free*, by Heath Lambert.