

Title: "Shadow Boxing –Fighting the Good Fight"
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Text: Timothy 6:11-12 (NIV)

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One of the joys that I remember from my twenty years in the ministry is that of attending worker's meeting. It was special because it happened only a couple of times each year. All of the ministers of a given conference would get together for a time of fellowship and learning.

With many of the young ministers pastoring 3 and 4 church districts several hundred miles from the Conference office these meetings were important for our instruction and especially for the fellowship.

Over the years, the meetings have changed in their content and character. These days the meetings are more relaxed and include more time for instruction, training, fellowship and encouragement.

But in the good old days, the meetings were more for presenting Conference-wide plans and reporting church activity. Each pastor would be given an opportunity to share briefly what good things were going on in his district of churches.

I remember one worker's meeting in particular. Glowing reports were being presented from all parts of the conference. Things

seemed to be going great guns everywhere but in my district. At least, that's the way it seemed to me.

It's not that we weren't getting results! The results just were not coming big enough or quickly enough. As each pastor gave his report, I became more apprehensive about what I was going to say when it was my turn. I even thought briefly about not saying anything. I would just simply sit there and hope that the brethren didn't miss my report. But reality set in very quickly! The Conference President had a list of all the pastors and he dutifully checked off each pastor's name as they gave their report.

When there only about 3 or 4 of us left to give our reports and I had finally decided the time had come for me to say something. My time had come! But then the pastor in the district next to mine saved me by standing up to give his report. He was a seasoned veteran having been in the ministry for more than 15 years already. He stood for a few moments in silence, and then simply said, **"In our district we are keeping the peace in Israel and the saints are doing battle with the devil."** Then he sat down! It probably was not what the Brethren wanted to hear, but it was the rock bottom truth.

Today, we want to talk about doing battle with the devil
And keeping the peace in the hearts of God's people.
We want to deal with one of the basic issues of life.
We are going to tackle a universal problem
That plagues everyone, everywhere,
Every day, every hour and every minute of the day.

We want to discover just how to handle sin and how to put the devil in his rightful place. All religions in one way or another attempt to deal with the issue of sin and evil. The New Age and Far Eastern religions attempt to rid themselves of an "evil karma" so that when they are reincarnated they will come back in better form. Even "Secular Humanism" seeks, through, education and social engineering to give opportunities to the next generation so as to make people better and able to do the right thing. Most of us have a real problem with sin. We let it get the best of us. **We have become like shadow boxers, doing our best to knock out, with one dramatic blow, this seemingly awesome foe.** One writer has written,

"Some die by the shrapnel of iniquity
And some go down in the flames
Of their persistent sins.
But most men perish inch by inch
In play at little games with sin."

We chase and we seek to engage sin in a battle to the finish! But in the end we find ourselves fighting an elusive foe that is like a phantom flying in the air.

It looks real!

It seems awesome!

But it is all in the imagination of our minds.

We Adventist Christians are not the only ones who have difficulty

with the handling of sin. It is pervasive through all society, religions and cultures.

But there really is a way to effectively handle sin.

We can be overcomers.

The victory can be claimed.

The good fight can be fought and won!

God's Word is clear to us about sin, its effects and its solution. The entire Bible seeks to encourage us about handling the sin problem.

One passage, in particular, is a very effective guide. Turn with me to **I Timothy 6:12**. Here is one place where God answers the problem of sin. The actual word, sin, itself is not mentioned but the solution to dealing with it is there. Here is one text of many that assures us that God intends for us to succeed in our battle against sin. **The text emphasizes four things:**

The Battle.

The Enemy.

The Victory.

The Plan.

Paul suggests in the first part of the verse that we are to fight the good fight of faith. Paul uses an athletic metaphor here. It is like the beginnings of a pep talk by the coach just before the game. The fight that is spoken of here is not your ordinary run-of-the-mill fight.

It is not the kind of fight where there is an exchange of words or fists for no good reason.

It is not the kind of fight that when it's finished no one can remember the original reason for the fight.

It is not the kind that has been worthless and useless.

As kids we often fight. In fact, it usually doesn't take much to precipitate one. The one fight from childhood that I remember most clearly happened back in Germany one Friday afternoon. We were living in a one-room apartment in a small farming village. We had our friends even though we were refugees and considered foreigners. But it was late Friday afternoon and we were not allowed to play since we were all cleaned up and waiting for Sabbath to come. I must tell you that my brother and I had not been this clean all week long! My mother had boiled our Sabbath potatoes and they were sitting on the stove cooling off and waiting for us to eat our evening meal.

Mother had to run a quick errand and reminded us once again to stay in the house and not to argue or fight. With our most angelic looks and voices my brother and I promised to behave. We assured her that no has ever behaved as well as we were going to behave! And so Mom left. All went quite well for about the first two minutes. My brother, Karl, and I did not argue nor did we fight among ourselves.

We heard shouting outside our window down on the street. We opened the window and looked outside to see what was going on. From our window on the second floor, we could see that our buddies were in a losing battle with another group in the village.

There were outnumbered and really needed our help. But, we had made a promise to Mom and couldn't leave the room. We could see the situation get more desperate each moment but then there was the promise and the resultant punishment if it was broken.

My brother being older and wiser figured out just what we could do to help our friends and still keep our promise. You see my older brother figured that helping our friend's win a fight was technically not included in the promise we made to mom. So he reached over to the stove and grabbed a couple of potatoes and gently threw them out the window to our friends. They caught them and hurled them at the other side. We continued to toss potatoes out the window until the pot was empty and our side had won a decisive victory.

We were really proud of ourselves for we had kept the promise. It wasn't long until Mom came back. We didn't say a word about our potato deed. But mom went straight to the stove and took off the lid from the pan and saw that the potatoes were all gone. It didn't take long for her to put two and two together and figure out what had happened. She had seen potato peelings and pieces all over the street and our window was open. Mom was not pleased!! She informed us that we had thrown the last of our food out and now she wondered what we were going to eat. The dumb thing is that to this day some 43 years later my brother and I **still can't figure what the fight was all about. But, we do remember the punishment.**

But Paul talks about a worthwhile fight, a decent battle, and an engagement for which we have a real good reason. The fight is good because we are not alone. First of all, we are in very good company when we do battle with sin. In chapter 6 verse 11, Timothy is called "a man of God". Here, Paul puts Timothy and us in the company of such men as Abraham,

Moses,

Samuel

And King David.

All of them were called men of God in the Old Testament.

Secondly, we are reminded in Matthew 28:18 that all power in heaven and earth has been given to Christ to give to us so that we might be successful.

Thirdly, God gives us the promise in II Chronicles 20:15-19 "You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you."

Fourth, the fact is that though we make mistakes and at times we ourselves will be the cause of our problems, God will not leave us alone. He will stick by us no matter what. One Christian writer has said, **"If in our ignorance we make missteps, the Savior does not forsake us. We need never feel alone.... In the way that leads to the City of God there are no difficulties, which those who trust in Him may not overcome. There are no dangers, which they may not escape. There is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy."**

Ministry of Healing, p. 249.

Every battle has an adversary. In order for a fight to happen, there must be an enemy. Our text does not make a direct identification

of the enemy. But it does make it clear just whom we should be fighting against. It is most logical to assume that sin is the enemy, that we should be doing battle against sin. On the surface sin is the problem. It is the disease that plagues us.

I John 5:17 says that all wrongdoing is sin.

I John 3:4, we are reminded that sin is lawlessness.

Romans 3:23 says that every one of us has sinned.

Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that we all, like sheep, have gone astray.

Romans 6:6 makes it clear that if we are crucified in Christ Jesus, then we destroy the body of sin.

Roman 6:22 and 23 says that we are free from the bondage of sin and have the gift of eternal life.

An intense battle was raging during a war many years ago. A young army officer standing high up on a hill was looking through field glasses and surveying the battlefield below. The General standing beside him asked, "Lieutenant, what do you see?" The young officer answered, "**Sir, I have seen the enemy and it is us.**"

The problem is not sin.

It is self!

The problem is personal and real!

It is interesting that if you take the word sin and remove the first and last letter you come face to face with the real problem of overcoming sin. Frank was a visitor to our little congregation. He had recently moved from the southwest to Illinois and wanted to

join our church family. He had been baptized just before he moved. He now asked if I would come to his house to visit and, perhaps, answer some questions that his wife had about the church and prepare for baptism. This, we quickly arranged.

I remember going over to Frank's house week after week and no matter what topic we began to study we always ended up on the same question about clean and unclean foods. After several weeks of this I became rather frustrated and decided that, perhaps, the real problem was not Frank's wife but Frank himself. I prayed about it regularly.

One Sabbath afternoon as we were studying, the Holy Spirit impressed me to ask Frank if he had accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. He said no. I asked him if he would accept Jesus. After several moments of silence, he said he just couldn't do it now. I lost track of Frank after that until late one night I received a long distance call from down in Texas. It was Frank. He wanted to know the name of the Adventist pastor in his town because now he was ready to surrender his life to Christ.

You see failing to surrender to Christ makes sin the resident ruler of our lives. Ellen White has written. **"The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."**

Steps to Christ, p. 27

It is never an easy task to give up self in favor of Christ. But it is a

necessary one. Peter Marshall, Chaplain of the US Senate during the 1940 's, described our problem. He said; **"We are too Christian to really enjoy sinning and too fond of sinning to really enjoy Christianity."** Many of us are fence sitters. We cannot decide whether to get down from the fence or to stay put. Sin has made many of us indecisive. We are, in reality, the Laodecian Church of Rev. 3.

Paul, in our Scripture text, makes it clear that victory is ours. We do not have to be defeated by sin time and time again. In II Timothy 4:6-8, we are assured that it is a victory that results in future benefits. Eternal life is the gift that God seeks to give us if we remain faithful and steadfast in love and grace. It is a time when sin will be erased from our experience. The Bible is filled with references of a victory that is ours for the asking. Eternal life is to be lived in a real place, with real people! Heaven is not virtual reality! Heaven is just as real as our world today but, without the sin, hatred, violence, pain, suffering and disappointments.

I John 3:2 reminds us that now, today, we are the children of God. We do not have to wait for some future date but now we can experience the victory in Christ. This victory means

Forgiveness of sin.

Cleansing from sin.

Absence of guilt.

Freedom from sin.

Romans 8:1 says that there is no condemnation if we are united in Christ.

Psalm 51:10 says that Jesus gives us a new heart.

It means the end of pretension.

It means we can come out of hiding.

It means the end of fence sitting.

It means that our renewed heart is made

To beat in unison with the heart of Jesus.

The method of achieving the victory is critical to our success. In verse II, Paul says that we are to pursue after righteousness. We are not to be content to be just curious about Jesus but rather we must choose to commit our lives to Him.

Jeremiah 17:14 speaks God's promise **that "Save me, and I shall be saved"**. After having the desire we must follow it up with action.

Matthew 16:24 and Luke 9:23 & 24 tell us that the method is a matter of denial or surrender. The solution to the sin problem is just what Jesus said it was and what he asked for---the deliberate decision at committed surrender. It is freely admitting that on our own we are nothing and can do nothing but fail! But Jesus and His cross are our pledge of salvation.

It is the cross that brings us neat to God, reconciling us to Him.

"Without the cross, we can have no union with our Heavenly Father. On the Cross depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Savior's love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with the fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith

at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain.” E.G. White

I will never forget Valdie Kane for as long as I live. It was the summer of 1964 and I had signed up for a special summer session of outreach evangelism in East St. Louis, Illinois. This city is located directly across the Mississippi River from St. Louis Missouri.

About 15 of the ministerial students at Andrews University had signed up to participate in an actual 6 week evangelistic campaign conducted by one of the University professors. A young medical student and I were teamed together and assigned to visit various individuals who at one time or another had shown some interest in the Adventist church. Valdie Kane and his wife lived on the Missouri side but he had worked all of his life in East St. Louis and his wife attended the church there. The reason that we received Valdie's name was that he had been baptized some 31 years ago by a famous Adventist Evangelist and in the language of the day Valdie had backslidden within a few months of the baptism. His wife never ceased to pray for him.

This time when Valdie responded to my invitation to accept Jesus he meant it with every fiber of his being. I don't believe that Valdie had the education or the ability to explain exactly what it was that he was accepting. He didn't understand what following Jesus is all about. He was not a theologian. He only knew that once he was a drunk who really had not had a sober day for the last 31 years of his life. But now he did. And he thanked Jesus for it.

You see, as far as Valdie Kane is concerned, and for any one else,
when it come to life changing experiences and eternal life,
It really doesn't matter what you know,

Or even what you do!

Rather it is whom you know that counts!