**Our Five Battles**

**Activity:** Have volunteers stand for a Simon Says style game, but instead of having them perform one task at a time, allow the commands to build on each other (nod your head, jump up and down, raise one foot, read a Scripture out loud, etc.). The game should get increasingly difficult as it goes on. Comment that it’s hard to follow so many rules! Ask if there was one rule that seemed more important to them.

*The Greatest Commandment*

When we think of the word “battle,” many things may come to mind. The definition of “battle” according to *Oxford Languages* is “to struggle tenaciously to achieve or resist something.” We are all aware that we are in a battle with our flesh and the enemy, but one of the things we may not consider is what we are fighting for. Let’s take a look at Mark 12:28-31 to lay the foundation for this lesson.

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God **IS** one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy **HEART**, and with all thy **SOUL**, and with all thy **MIND**, and with all thy **STRENGTH**: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these [emphasis added] (Mark 12:28-31 KJV).

In this passage, Jesus was asked what was the greatest, or first, commandment of all. The word “first” comes from the Greek word *prōtos*, which means foremost (in time, place, order or importance), before, or former. Take note that there are about 613 commandments altogether. This seems like an important question! Instead of responding that they were all of equal importance, Jesus declared one commandment to be the greatest: to hear that the Lord is one, and that we are to love Him with all we have. Think about this: if the Lord considers this commandment to be of high value, then wouldn’t it be something the enemy would constantly target? Whether we realize it or not, Satan fights against us when we obey this first and greatest commandment! Here we find our first battle: understanding who God is.

*The Battle to Know Who He Is*

The only way to know God is through embracing the truth of Scripture, and the truth of the oneness of God is one of the most precious revelations that we could receive. He is not a trinity or a demigod. He is One, and Jesus was that one God manifested in the flesh. When I have a revelation of who He is, He is then able to reveal to me who I am! See Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Isaiah 44:6, 8; John 4:22.

Once we receive the truth that He alone is God, He desires that we continue learning to learn more about who He is. We learn of God’s love, mercy, and faithfulness. Once we begin to understand who God is, the battle changes. Now we may no longer be fighting to believe in God’s oneness or His character, but our battle becomes loving Him with all that we have. “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ***all*** thy heart, and with ***all*** thy soul, and with ***all*** thy mind, and with ***all*** thy strength: this is the first commandment [emphasis added]” (Mark 12:30). We must not allow there to be any part of us that does not love the Lord.

*The Battle for Your Heart*

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy **HEART**… [emphasis added]” (Mark 12:30). The heart may be an actual physical organ, but when we reference it in a biblical context, the heart is known as the place of your emotions, desires, longings, and affections. What happens in your heart is critical, and your enemy knows that. Proverbs 4:23 tells us, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” Keep your heart; preserve it and guard it from dangers.

What kind of dangers can affect our hearts? Jesus answered this when He addressed the Pharisees in Matthew 15: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man” (Matthew 15:18-20). The enemy knows that if he can get into your heart, he can defile you completely. There is a battle for your heart and God wants ALL of it!

Sometimes the battle we fight is not whether we will serve God or the devil. It is easy to say we will serve God when we understand that the alternative is serving Satan! Our biggest challenge comes with the decision to serve God over pleasing ourselves or others. When God wants me to do something that will separate me from my peers at school or my family, or my job begins to interfere with my ability to serve the Lord, or my mind and flesh start to desire the things of this world, I have to make a choice. There is only one throne in my heart. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

*The Battle for Your Soul*

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God ...with all thy **SOUL**… [emphasis added]” (Mark 12:30). Your soul is what Jesus came and died on the cross for. Your enemy is after it and so is this world. Your soul is the seat of your will. Jesus told the crowds to deny themselves and lose their lives for His sake (Mark 8:34-38). “Deny” comes from a word that literally means to disavow ownership, or to disown. For us to deny ourselves as Jesus instructed is more than to simply exercise self-control. Self-denial in this context is us acknowledging that we are not our own masters! Instead, we must admit and live as though we belong to God. Jesus paid a price for your soul, a very great price so that He could have you for eternity. He will not settle for part of your soul but wants your entire will.

If it took Jesus hours to lay aside His will in the Garden of Gethsemane, how much more effort will it probably take us! Don’t be discouraged when you realize how strong your will can be. However difficult it may be, your will needs to be crucified and laid down in your own Garden of Gethsemane so that you may do the will of God in your life.

*The Battle for Your Mind*

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God… with all thy **MIND**…” (Mark 12:30).The battleground for the soul begins in the mind. We have to be aware of the battle for our minds! Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about how to guard their minds: “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:4-5).

There is a battle being waged for our minds. How are we able to tell the origin of thoughts that come to us? By seeing what kind of fruit the thought produces in us. We can’t afford to believe every thought or idea we have. There may be a stronghold at work, trying to fortify itself against the knowledge of God and eventually destroy you! It is God's will that we resist against any attempt of the enemy to gain ground in our minds. To ensure this, it is critical to ask and allow God to remove existing strongholds. We do this through reading and receiving the written Word and preached word as well as through times of prayer.

*The Battle for Your Strength*

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God… with all thy **STRENGTH** [emphasis added]” (Mark 12:30). “Strength” here could mean forcefulness or ability. In order to love the Lord with all of our strength, we have to be willing to give Him all of our abilities so that He can use them for His glory. Consider the parable of the talents: it wasn’t enough for the servant to simply return the original talent to his master. Those talents were meant to be used in the master’s interests.

God has given each of us gifts and callings, and Paul claimed that those are given “without repentance” (Romans 11:29). We need to make sure that whatever abilities the Lord has blessed us with, we are turning around and investing them right back into His kingdom. We should use our abilities, giftings, and strengths in ways that glorify God.

*Winning the Battle*

The ideas of taking our spiritual weapons, girding up the loins of our minds, and guarding our hearts all convey the same message: we are in a battle! Realizing this is the first step to winning it. You will not accidentally win a war! The battles we face to understand who God is, guard our heart, surrender our soul, renew our mind, and submit our strengths are ones we have to fight consistently so that we don’t lose ground to the enemy.

If we understand the oneness of God but do not submit our hearts to Him, He will not be satisfied. God will only be satisfied with ALL of us, including our understanding. Once we have won those five battles, we are able to march victoriously on to the next greatest commandment: to love our neighbor.