

SPIRITUAL WARFARE: The Battle of Life

Sermon series on Spiritual Warfare by Ray C. Stedman. Combined file of 19 messages.

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THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

by Ray C. Stedman

Each of you must have asked yourself at some time, "What can I do about these problems that are so widespread and serious these days?" And, "How helpful can I really expect to be as an individual?"

The Scriptures have an answer to these questions. We might expect that they would, for they are perfect the man of God, that he may be perfect, completely furnished unto every good work {cf, Eph 4:12}. So we should expect that there would be ample guidance given in the Scriptures to enable us to handle the problems and questions which pursue us on every side.

The passage we are to center our thoughts upon these next few weeks is Second Corinthians, chapters 1-6, first six verses. Here is another of those pockets of condensed wisdom which you find frequently throughout the pages of the Scriptures, both in the Old Testament and New alike, and which it is very unwise

inserted into the machinery of humanity at the very beginning and which we all inherit from our parents. We are responsible for the fact that all of us began life with a taint, a twist in our mechanism. It is not that we are evil; it is quite apparent that we are fundamentally selfish. You do not have to teach a baby to be selfish; he will be selfish. You do not have to send him to a private school to learn how to be naughty, to resist his parents, or to be inhumanly selfish. This taint crops up in any individual no matter what kind of a background, exposure, or environment he is subjected to; it is in the bloodstream of humanity. This is the unpleasant fact which society, with all its power, resists, which man does not want to face, but which the Word of God bluntly and clearly states:

If that is the flesh, that tendency to evil in every individual, then if you put all these flesh-centered, flesh-governed people together into a society, you have what the Bible calls "the world." It is society governed by the flesh; society, with all the power structures with which we are so familiar in this day, all based on self-interest. This, any observer of human life can see, pervades the world of our day; self-interest governs everything.

That is why the revisers have substituted the word "world" here. In a sense, they are right. This is the idea the apostle has in mind. He says, "We are not acting like other people. We do not operate from the same motives; there is something quite different about us. If you try to judge us on the same basis you use to judge other people, you are going to be very far off -- you will miss the point entirely."

He is declaring also the fundamental tension in which a Christian lives. He says, "We live in the flesh, in the world of normal society, but we do not fight on those terms. We are not carrying on a worldly war." It might be helpful in this connection to review the rendering of certain other versions. J. B. Phillips has it this way:

The truth is that, although of course we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. {2 Cor 10:3 J. B. Phillips}

The New English Bible puts it:

Weak men we may be; but it is not as such that we fight our battles. {2 Cor 10:3 NEB}

Perhaps the most helpful is the Living Letters translation, which says,

It is true that I am an ordinary weak human being, but I don't use human plans and methods to win my battles. {2 Cor 10:3 Living Letters}

Notice the exquisite balance and sanity of that. The Apostle Paul is speaking not only for himself, but for all Christians. Remember that an apostle is a pattern Christian. He is what all Christians are supposed to be. He says, first, we live in the world. We don't run away from it. Monastic life has appealed to many people in many centuries. History is full of men and women who have retreated to quiet places and tried to shut out the mundane prattle and care of life. Count Tolstoi, of Russia; Rousseau, of France; Gauguin, the painter, all tried to run away from life. There are many who seek to do so yet today. What astonishes me is that there are still Christians who have this attitude. There has grown up in our time what I call the "Bible-city syndrome." It attempts to create a Christian hothouse, an atmosphere which is thoroughly Christian from the very beginning to the very end, and permits no invasion of secular ideas or forces. It seeks to insulate and isolate as much as possible the Christian from the world.

This is basically unbiblical and sub-Christian because it is contrary to this clear word of the apostle Paul: "We Christians live right in the midst of the world." That is where we are supposed to be. The Lord himself put it this way: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," {Matt 10:16 KJV}. It is not that I am a crazy sheepherder who would do a thing like that! Yet that is how radical is the difference between the true Christianity and the false version so evident in many places today. This "Bible-city syndrome" is producing thousands of Christian dropouts today. I understand there is a group in this very area that is suggesting something of this nature in the mountains near here. I do not know the whole story and therefore am not trying to judge it, but I would certainly be against a Christian isolation ward if that is what they have in mind. It is thoroughly unbiblical. "No," says the apostle, "we live in the flesh: we live in the world." That is

are intended to live. It is well expressed in the old hymn,

Where cross the crowded ways of life.
Where sound the cries of race and clan.
Above the noise of selfish strife.
We hear thy voice,
O Son of Man.

It reveals reality. Jesus Christ came, in the words of this present generation, to "tell it as it is" and he did so. Invariably, always, he told it as it is. He let people know the facts about life, and about man. He unveiled reality, he tore away the illusions and delusions under which men labor. He took off veils. You can watch him exposing the faulty thinking of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and other groups with which he came in contact, including his own disciples. Here, in the Word of God, in the truth as it is in Jesus, we have a powerful weapon, the greatest one there is in man's hands for telling things the way they are.

One of the reasons why the group of laymen from this area who have been traveling to college campuses have found such an effective ministry is that they do not try to impress the students with displays of erudition and worldly wisdom. They simply talk about life as the Scriptures reveal it, and it is surprising how this grasps, moves, and captures the minds and thoughts of this present generation.

Truth is the stock in trade of a Christian, that is, if he accepts the Word of God as the truth and if he proclaims it, and demonstrates it in his own life, he himself is a mighty weapon for setting men free and for solving the ills of society. Not only truth proclaimed, but truth demonstrated. One of the weaknesses of the church is that it has often been too content to simply proclaim a portion of the truth and never give itself to the demonstration of it. But a Christian, above all others, ought to be characterized by openness and honesty. Let me quote to you a paragraph or two from an article in Eternity magazine entitled "The Slickest Gimmick of All"

There is a potency and wholesomeness in living life transparently rather than endlessly erecting postures and fraudulent pieties.

That is a descriptive word for much of Christianity, isn't it? Fraudulent pieties!

This modern world of ours is generously supplied with pitchmen and con artists and those with axes to grind. These are enthusiastically and persistently using the big lie on us. Hence, it is an arresting and refreshing experience to meet a person or a group that is authentic and transparently open.

That is what every Christian ought to be, and every Christian group. I was distressed this year when I learned of an evangelical church that is teaching its people that they have the right to privacy in their lives. No Christian has the right to a private life. Our lives are to be lived openly before all men, transparent, a spectacle unto all the world. We have no private lives and we must not expect to have them. This is basically and fundamentally wrong. Christians are to be demonstrations of the truth. The article goes on,

The church where Jesus Christ is openly and honestly confessed is a potent commodity particularly in our disillusioned, jaded civilization. Many weary people want to find a place where God's Word is revealed, taught, and translated into daily life. At least that's the kind of church I want for my family. Not a church posing this week as a circus, next week as a sociological supermarket, next month as a pietistic pole, but a church which purports in its proclamation to be what it is -- the body of Christ -- a fellowship where Christ's people come together for renewal, for instruction in God's word, and for sharing in the spread of the gospel.

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free," {John 8:32 NIV}.

2. The second weapon is love. I know this is the most overworked word in our vocabulary today, but let's be specific: I am not talking about the Hollywood slush that passes for love, nor of the heart tolerance of anything that comes along, I am talking about biblical love, the kind that is returned from the individual loved. That is love, the kind that is described in First Corinthians 13:4-7, the kind that loves for Christ's sake. If you cannot love that way then you are not a Christian, at least not the kind of a Christian you subscribe to. If you can, then you must begin to show acceptance and concern without partiality or merit, without regard to the background or the color of skin of anything else about an individual, except that he or she is a man or woman loved by God for whom Christ died. Your love must go out to them, not your momentary interest until you gain the

adherence to your creed; but your genuine love, demanding nothing in return.

That is love, and that is a mighty weapon. That is the way the early church won their way through councils and governors, kings and edicts, and everything else. They won it by the demonstration of the warmth of acceptance that made their meetings such glorious occasions of fellowship that the world hung around, drooling, wanting to get in.

3. The third weapon is righteousness. Fundamentally, that means obedience to both truth and what we call integrity. It is the refusal to yield to expediency. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do," {Eph 4:17b}. You cannot go on excusing your weakness. There are no excuses left to you; you have all that it takes to be all that is needed. You cannot be justifying your failures. You have no reason for failure. You must stop your lying, your stealing, your cursing, your immorality, and your harshness toward one another, your unforgiveness, your anger, and your petulance. But in its place, because righteousness is never just negative, you must have kindness, tenderheartedness, acceptance and forgiveness for Christ's sake -- the warmth of love. If all you can hold up on behalf of your righteous standing is that you don't smoke, drink, gamble, go to movies, etc., you are a pitiful spectacle of a Christian. If you are a Christian there must be something in your life a quality that cannot be explained in terms of your personality -- a positive glow, a radiance and a radiance which cannot be explained except by the fact that God is at work in you.
4. The fourth weapon is a compound one. I shall put it this way: Faith-prayer. I put the two together because they are almost indistinguishable. Faith is reliance on the direct activity of God in history. Prayer is the request for that activity; faith is the expectation that God will do it. These two go together. If you do not think they are powerful, I suggest you read through Hebrews 11. That is a list of the achievements of faith in society, in terms of government, warfare, social ills, and in every kind. Faith is the expectation that God has not dismissed society, nor does he exist apart from it, but he is involved in it, and is active in it. He is moving; he does things; he changes; he accomplishes; he thwarts; he overthrows; he builds up and exalts; and he does all this in answer and through the medium of prayer. I do not know how to put it any stronger, but in the coming messages I want to outline more fully to you what prayer is, and how it works. What a mighty weapon! What our hands in these days through this means!

There they are: truth, love, righteousness, and faith-prayer. These are the weapons of our warfare; not carnal, they are not of the flesh, they are not of the world; but they are mighty. They have divine power. They are the eliminating of strongholds, pulling down high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. They all work together. You cannot have one from the other; they are all necessary. And when the church begins to major on these weapons, it will once again become a mighty power in society, a tremendously potent force, a ferment let loose which will rapidly change the outward circumstances, the face of things as they are. Then the church will once again be what God designed it to be -- in those glowing words in the Song of Solomon, an army "Bright as the sun, glorious as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," {cf, Song 6:10}

Prayer

Our gracious Father, what a challenge you set before us in these words! How much they call for in us to review of our own lives in the light of these thundering declarations! Grant to us, our Father, that we may see the challenge of the hour in which we live, and realize that we have been uniquely called to do the only thing that counts in this day and age. Help us to give ourselves to it through Jesus Christ our Lord, for we pray in his mighty, triumphant name, Amen.

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Scripture: 2 Cor 10:1-4
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PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS

by Ray C. Stedman

In Second Corinthians 10 we are attempting to discover just what the Apostle Paul means when Verses 3 and 4,

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. {2 Cor 10:3-4 RSV}

The weapons by which the world (or society, if you prefer) seeks to attack the problems that are present in this world are very plain to us. They are investigations, studies of all kinds, reports from committees, meetings, educational programs, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, pressure blocs, legislation, etc. If you are a student of history at all you know that the world is unchanged, in this from Paul's day. These were exactly the same weapons that society used to confront the problems present in the Roman Empire when Paul wrote this letter. If you question that, I refer you to Will Durant's great volumes *The History of Civilization*. You will find that he records exactly the same processes going on then as now.

But, in Second Corinthians, the Apostle Paul repudiates these as proper means for Christians to be attacking these strongholds. He sets them aside, not because they are basically wrong, but because they are essentially ineffective: They do not accomplish the task. It is not that some of these means might be part of the working out of solutions, but they are not the primary thing. That is what the apostle declares. They are not the thing upon which one depends for victory in these struggles and battles of life. Paul declares, "the weapons of our warfare are mighty." They are powerful. Literally, this is the word from which we get our word "dynamite." These weapons work. They effectively solve the knotty and difficult life, these running saddle-sores of civilization where evil is entrenched. ~~strongholds~~ evil.

We saw in our last study that these weapons are revealed to us in various Scriptures. They are essentially

First, there is truth, i.e., the revelation of reality, the exposure of things as they really are. In Romans this is called "the weapon of light." Turning on the light is a marvelous weapon for helping to dispel the darkness of these areas where entrenched evil is rampant, in our day or any other day. Truth is the weapons.

Then love is linked with truth. Everywhere in Scripture you find these two great forces linked together and love. Paul writes to the Ephesians and exhorts them to "speak the truth in love" {Eph 4:15}, and in the second letter of John we read,

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. {2 Jn 1:3 RSV}

The third weapon is righteousness, i.e., moral rectitude, right behavior, in line with reality. In this study in Chapter 6, the Apostle Paul refers to "The weapons of light" in 2 Jn 1:3. In 2 Jn 1:3 (darkness of the world)

the wicked one," {cf, Eph 6:16}. In this passage, faith is linked with prayer, "praying always for all" {cf, Eph 6:18}, in every situation.

Here are the weapons which the church is to employ. These are what the Christian is to be armed with. Therefore, he fights in a quite different dimension from that of the world, and society in general. Victory in this dimension is the key to the solution of these burning, pressing social problems. Whenever the church uses these weapons it is always weak and irrelevant, useless, shunned and ignored by the world around it. This is happening in many places today. Wherever these weapons are taken up, as history confirms, and the present generation is discovering, there is the losing of power. The church becomes an irresistible force loose in society, a mighty flood of dauntless force that begins to dissolve these problems and to attack them at their root.

I want to take a closer look at the problems the apostle is describing. He uses in this passage the language of strongholds

stretching wide between them impassable, impossible to cross.

These are the strongholds Paul is talking about. These are the things that bother us. They are the things that make our lives wretched and miserable, and create unhappiness and tension. Immorality is a similar example of our day. Here is a stronghold of evil. Sexual perversion! What a terrible thing it is and what a despairing thing going up from young people today who are in the grip of perverse practices, and who are looking

I saw this week a letter from a homosexual crying out for help, asking for deliverance. He said he had seriously contemplated suicide many times, for all he could look forward to was a wretched and miserable life. Surely here is an area where the church ought to be speaking, where these "weapons of righteousness" should be turned loose.

Against these strongholds we are not helpless. That is the thing we must understand from this passage. We are not helpless. We are to attack these things, carry the day. This is what Jesus inferred in Matthew

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. {cf, Matt 16:18}

"The gates of hell" is not a symbol for a defensive action. It is not a church which is being assaulted from outside. It is true that the Scriptures describe the Christian's struggle as an individual as being on the defensive (as in Ephesians 6). But when the Scriptures view the entire thrust of the church in its relationship to the world, it is never pictured as on the defensive: It is on the offense. The "gates of hell" mean that the gates of a strong city are being assailed and are under attack. "And," says the Lord Jesus, "my church shall not prevail. The gates of hell will not prevail against it, but it shall be able to subdue and break down the strongholds and to release those that are held captive."

That is exactly what the Apostle Paul is saying here. The weapons of our warfare are mighty. I will thunder those words in such a way as to capture your imagination and help you to see how wrong is the terrible attitude of pessimism and despair that exists among Christians these days. Many act as though all we can do is to hang on to what we've got and wait for the Lord to come. It is terrible, it is wrong! We are called to do. We are called to attack these strongholds, and weapons are placed in our hands -- of might, weapons of dynamite, weapons of power -- that are able to subdue and break down the strongholds of evil.

The Bible is full of examples of this for our encouragement. There are many places in the Old and New Testament alike where these weapons prevail against the entrenched evil that is present in society.

You have an example in the Old Testament in the case of Jonah, where the weapon of truth is used to set the whole city free. Here is a heathen, pagan city, Nineveh, which, in its ignorance and darkness, was being destroyed by things that were destroying the life of its people. This is always what error does -- it results in personal degradation, in insanity and demon possession, in the destruction of humanity. Jonah was sent to the city to preach. The biblical account centers largely upon the prophet's personal desire to escape the punishment that was given to him. But when he finally fulfills it, what is the result? The truth that Jonah preached, the God who sits over human life, and judges it, and who oftentimes permits catastrophe in order to make men and women beings wake up and see what is going on that truth delivered this city. Jonah said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed," {cf, Jonah 3:4}. The result was, from the king right down to the most common people in the city, they all repented. The entire city turned from their evil, faced the facts of life, and the city was spared for over a hundred years. That is the direct thrust of the weapon of truth against a strong

You can see how the weapon of love prevailed in many places in the Scriptures:

There is the story of David and Jonathan, that wonderful story of friendship between two men who were on opposite sides of the political fence. One was the son of the king, and the other was the greatest enemy of the king's throne. By all rights these two men should have been at one another's throats, but they were not. They loved one another with a love "surpassing the love of women," {cf, 2 Sam 1:26}. As a result

David became king, Jonathan was delighted and did nothing at all to withstand him. The threatened

Radical fresh look at sex. Free book and counsel. God loves you as you are. Write Dolphin, 265 Lytton. Palo Alto.

Almost the first letter he received was an invitation to appear on the national Joe Pyne television program to be interviewed, and thus to spread the good news about a true and proper approach to sex through the medium of television -- at someone else's cost! That is the way God does things when we begin to move out of some of the strongholds around us. Let us be praying for Lambert. I hope he will respond affirmatively to the invitation. He will need our prayers as he attacks one of the most terrible and awful strongholds of our generation. But he seeks to attack it with the weapons of truth, love, righteousness and faith-prayer.

Some of you can move out this way too. We do not need to sit dormant in this day. What a day for us is! -- but action based upon the facts, action based upon truth. What a thrill it is to see God working in our generation!

Prayer

Our Father, we are challenged by this word of the Apostle Paul. We look back on history and we see the records there they are for all of us to see how this man and his associates changed the world of their day and gained a reputation for being "those who turned the world upside down." They became a dynamic force that has never been equaled in human history. Lord, surely these are times that call for men and women like that again today. We pray that you will cause us to be such. Lord, train us, make us, shape us. Put in our hands -- as you have them -- the weapons of truth and righteousness and love and faith, and teach us how to use them effectively in our day. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Pulling down Strongholds

Series: The Battle of Life

Scripture: 2 Cor 10:3-4

Message No: 2

Catalog No: 287

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THE METHODS OF MADNESS

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series we are facing together the truly relevant problem of how a Christian should deal with the social ills and injustices of our day. I suppose there has never been a time when these disorders were more widespread. They press upon us every way we turn and we cannot escape them. We need to find an answer to these from the Scripture and we are doing so in the light of Second Corinthians 10:3-4 introduced in Verses 3 and 4.

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. {2 Cor 10:3-4 RSV}

In this passage, as we have previously seen, two things are immediately evident:

1. One is that we cannot and we must not ignore these problems. "We live in the world," says the Apostle Paul. We must not try to evade them or ignore them. We must not try to run away from them. It is basically unChristian to run away from the problems of life, to seek a shelter where we can spend our years without encountering the difficulties around us.

This was not the case with Jesus Christ. He lived square in the middle of life. He lived life up to the hilt and associated with those afflicted with grievous problems, emotionally, physically, and in every other way. This is also where the Christian must live. We live in the world. We must not adopt a head-in-the-sand attitude. These bodily ills concern us, or they ought to. We remember the words of the Gospels, concerning the Lord Jesus, that he looked upon the multitudes with compassion, regarding them "as sheep not having a shepherd" {cf, Matt 9:36}, wandering about without help or guidance in the midst of perplexing and confusing situations which they did not understand, being distressed because of ignorance. But since he possessed the light and the truth he longed to convey it. This must also be the attitude of the Christian in these matters.

2. Second, in this brief paragraph, it is apparent that we do not and must not attack these strongholds in the way the world does. Says the apostle, "We live in the world but the weapons of our warfare are not worldly." We do not face life the same way. We fight in another dimension, and yet our warfare is not weak; it is powerful. It wins, it succeeds, it is mighty. In a previous study we noted in the Bible a way something of the nature of these problems in individual and social life. They are what we call strongholds, i.e., places and situations where evil is entrenched, where it cannot be dislodged because it is powerfully defended. There are many such in our day. They abound around us on every side. Many have become issues which the world is struggling vainly to alleviate, but without success.

But we have not yet learned enough about these problems, so I invite you to look further at Verse 5. The apostle says,

We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." {2 Cor 10:5 RSV}

There are two things revealed here:

- First, there is the source of the enemy's strength; and,
- Second, there is the nature of the Christian's attack.

Today we shall concern ourselves only with the first of these two, the source of the enemy's strength.

One of the chief rules of warfare is, know your enemy. You can never be successful as a soldier if you do not know something of the tactics of the enemy. This is true in military conflict and it is true in spiritual warfare as well. The second rule of warfare is, know your weapons. Know what you have to meet the enemy and know how to use them. Right here, of course, is why the church has been so weak. It is because it has neglected both of these areas. It has not understood its enemy, and it has not understood its own weapons. These are both revealed in this one verse of Scripture, and we must take time to look at them carefully to understand what they mean.

Let us come to grips with the first issue:

What makes these strongholds so strong? From whence does the enemy derive the strength that enables them to remain entrenched in human society? Why is it so difficult to eradicate these pockets of evil in our social structures? Why do they defy the attempts made by sincere and earnest men and women, such as the police, in our daily newspapers week after week, to eliminate or control these problems? Why are they so difficult to control?

What we are asking, in terms of our own day, is essentially this: Why is drug traffic so hard to eliminate among young people? Why do they seem to resist such efforts? Why can't they see how destructive the effects of becoming involved with LSD, marijuana, and other drugs available today? And we are asking, what makes student unrest so unmanageable? Why are the campuses so constantly in turmoil? Why is it that the application of good, sound, commonsense principles does not seem to solve the situation? Why is it that the parties involved cannot sit down and talk out their differences amicably? Why are they so unhelpful? Why does it all seem to suddenly explode in riot and demonstration and violence?

We are also asking: Why are race problems so explosive? Here is another area where violence seems to be so easily kindled.

beneath the surface of almost every meeting that is called to try to discuss these problems. Why must we ask these deep questions if we are going to understand the enemy we attack. And we must, for we are Christians, living in the world. The world is the way it is because of certain factors at large which are made clear by the Word of God. If you think the Bible has no relevancy to life, you have misjudged its character. It deals precisely with life. It is the book made to go with life, and therefore it offers us the only workable solutions to these problems.

What we are asking, among other questions, is: What makes Communism so attractive to many people? Despite its obvious record of enslavement, murder, rape, and pillage, what makes this philosophy so appealing to so many minds, to so many educated, intelligent minds? What is the appeal of these things? Why do they get their strength? Also, why does materialism and humanism take such a deadly toll of despair, depression, and suicide in our own day, especially among young people?

Did you know that last year over 10,000 students in our universities in America took their own lives, a far worse toll than the Vietnam war takes. Why is this? Why are these things so strong? From where do they derive such strength, such defiant persistence, such clinging tenacity?

The answer lies in the two elements which Paul describes for us in Verse 5. These are always present in every problem where evil is at work, whether it is in the individual life or the social life. Though the Bible speaks of evil as appealing largely to the individual, we must remember that society is nothing but a collection of individuals. Therefore these things have direct relevance also to social areas.

What are these two elements? Here are the pillars of strength of evil, revealed to us: First, says Paul, they are "arguments." In the Greek *logismos*, which means "reasonings." Second, their strength derives from "every proud obstacle." Pride, in other words. Literally, it is "every high thing which exalts itself above every point of pride which expresses itself in conceit or self-praise, self-exaltation, and whose final thrust is, as Paul puts it, "against the knowledge of God." That is where evil derives its strength. These are the two things: reasonings and the independent pride which insists that man does not need God. These are the pillars from which evil derives its ultimate strength.

You will note immediately that there is a relationship between these two things. Reasonings, "arguments," are the outward expression of the inward attitude of self-sufficient pride. This is why social problems are so often impervious to the weapons the world uses. Why is it that men cannot seem to get anywhere in solving social problems by meetings, discussions, committee reports, investigations, and all the other things? It is because the weapons they are using are infected with the same disease they are trying to cure! The ones attempting to solve these problems are doing so with minds and hearts already twisted and affected by the evil they are trying to get at.

This is what men do not see. They think that an earnest desire is all that it takes, but they do not realize that they, themselves, are affected by the very same evils. Even Christians, obviously, can approach these problems in the same way. Whenever Christians approach these problems with the world's weapons they display the same weakness.

Let us take a closer look at these points of strength from which evil derives its power and its persistence.

First, there are these reasonings, these arguments. Have you noticed in reading history or in studying the movements around you, that every movement in society which eventually becomes a threat, i.e., an attack upon the status quo, always originates (if you can get back to the beginning of it) as an emotional outburst? It never begins with someone coolly sitting down and planning to start a movement. It always begins with some emotional outburst. Then, having taken that form at the beginning, it is soon apparent that, in order to continue the movement and to expand it, it will be necessary to justify it. It needs to be explained and defended. It calls therefore for the activity of writers and speakers who can support the cause with arguments.

When a movement begins as an emotional outburst it is rather simple to control. At that early stage the movement it can be easily handled. Those involved can usually sit down with others and work out the details as emotions cool, wiser heads prevail. This happens all the time. There are incipient movements all around us.

good as well as the bad, the true as well as the false. Each has its philosophy, its defenders, its theologians, if you like, who are constantly justifying and explaining why things happen. But you can see the difference between the good and the bad, between truth and error, when you see what is at the heart of it, what is the thrust of it, what is behind it which men are trying to bring out.

In the good, it is always "the knowledge of God," the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. The Lord himself said, "No man can know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" {Matt 11:27}. Think of that claim! No man can know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. If that is true then the knowledge of God is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus said in his great prayer in John 17, "This is life eternal, that men may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," {cf, John 17:3}. That is what the knowledge of God is: it is knowing the Son for it is through him that we know the Father.

Then, look at the heart of any philosophy, at its arguments and reasonings: It may not even mention God, does it exalt man? That is the point. If it is lifting up man as something high and great, something that prides itself, praises itself, that is the test. When you see what lies behind these things, then you can tell if it is a doctrine of demons or the truth as it is in Jesus.

Look at what is behind the arguments for drugs, for instance. What do you read today, what are you hearing about drugs? Well, they are told that, in experiencing drugs, there is a promise of color, new excitement, and fulfillment in life. But it is all without God. It is a promise of finding fulfillment without reference whatsoever to the only One who can produce this in human life. It ignores God, sets him aside, they talk about God, but not God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. Therefore this whole movement is demonic, a doctrine of demons, leading men not into freedom and liberty but into enslavement, where their minds and hearts are being destroyed. Our mental institutions are now being filled with the most deluded of young people who have been deluded into an experiment with drugs, and their minds are being destroyed.

What lies behind race prejudice, whether it be white or black? It is becoming very apparent that there are many more black racists as there are white, proportionately. What lies behind that? You can see clearly that it is for pride, for domination over others, for the exaltation of "my group" as opposed to someone else. Racism is always this, and, therefore, it is clearly a doctrine of demons. These reasonings, no matter how plausible the arguments may sound in support of them, are revealed at their heart as being "highly" exalting themselves against the knowledge of God.

What is behind student unrest, violence, and riots, in our day? There is a degree of legitimate protest. But when it moves in the realm of violence, when it becomes a mob, smashing and burning and looting and defying authority, it reveals itself to be motivated by a love of power, pride of will, loving to pit will against will, glorying in defiance of authority.

Against this, says the apostle, we are to bring the weapons of truth, love, righteousness, and faith, because they destroy reasonings. They pull down arguments, they demolish them, and the pride built upon them. How does it all happen? It is to that question that we will address ourselves in our next study, but we can summarize it quickly by saying: It is by the gospel, by the declaring and demonstrating of the gospel. The gospel is, in its widest range, love, truth, faith, and righteousness. These are what the gospel is, and these are the things that demolish these strongholds. Therefore we can demolish these strongholds by the demonstration of the gospel.

I am not talking now merely of preaching, or teaching the truth, or handing someone a New Testament Bible or a tract. That is not what the Scripture means when it speaks of proclaiming the gospel. It must be like those jet planes that are used in military warfare today. They have a machine gun or missile mounted in the nose, and in order to bring it to bear upon an enemy the whole plane has to be aimed. No longer these old slow planes with a machine gun on a swivel mount that could be aimed in any direction while the plane flew straight on. No, you must aim the whole plane. Thus the whole life of the Church must be aimed. If your telling of the truth is canceled out by your failure to live it in our own experience, if you fail to show the love of Jesus Christ and the warmth of acceptance, then you are producing no fruit, and your message is death. It will be rejected, cast out, spewed out by society, as tasteless and useless and worthless.

truly bring the gospel to bear, what tremendous changes result.

Remember how Paul exemplified this when he went to the city of Corinth, where the people were their lives of immorality, shame, sordidness, and pagan barrenness, by arguments, and reasonings them, "When I came to you, ... I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified," {1 Cor 2:1-2 KJV}. That is, I did not come to debate with you. I did not come with the of this world. I did not come to cancel out your arguments with a counter-argument. I did not come with philosophy. I came to declare to you that in Jesus Christ there is relief, release, and deliverance from the human heart; pride is slain by the cross. When you accept what this cross means, and what who died for you has done, and you kneel at his feet, there is released in your life a power that conquers your pride. You are brought low before him, and God begins to make you over again on a different

That is the power of the gospel.

That is the power of the Christian.

That is the message that will, alone, help society.

I wish we Christians could understand how great is this program that God has put in our hands.

Series: The Battle of Life
Scripture: 2 Cor 10:3-5
Message No: 3
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HOW CHRISTIANS ATTACK

by Ray C. Stedman

We have come to a most critical point in our present series. In our study together in Second Corinthians we have seen how the Apostle Paul has revealed the truth behind the problems we face in life, both individually and on the social level. These problems ~~Baron~~ ^{Baron} ~~hold~~ ^{hold}, i.e., situations where evil is entrenched and produces hard, tough, difficult problems that are not easily solved. Who of us is not? We have many of these abounding in life today?

In our last study we saw the secret of the strength of these strongholds. We saw that it lies in the apostle points out to us; that behind these problems that puzzle and bedevil society and individuals -- and especially in our age -- are two elements: human pride, that is, pride as independence from self-sufficient humanity; and second, that pride expressed through clever and plausible arguments and reasoning that make the action based on pride sound like the logical thing to do. If you have been at all with the news media of our day, you are aware how widespread are these arguments and how these plausible-sounding defenses of the pride that is behind the problems of society. It is important to understand, as we seek to explain life in the light of the Scriptures, that they reveal that the heart of the problem is always pride, this human sense of sufficiency without God.

There is nothing wrong with human sufficiency in itself. God intended man to be a capable being -- in himself. There is the great lie. He does not have capability in himself; it lies in God. Therefore the perception that sees man as being capable apart from God is an unrealistic, false illusion. Yet upon this illusion the modern outlook upon life is based. Sometimes this pride is manifest, as we see today, in wounded ego, stemming from some fancied or real injustice -- the underdog mentality. Sometimes it is manifest as a kind of inflated self-assurance that rides roughshod over the feelings and rights of others. But in either case, whether up-and-out or the down-and-out, it is pride that lies at the root of activity.

As we have already seen, when that pride is buttressed by arguments -- sometimes passionate, sometimes coldly logical -- it becomes strong, immovable, entrenched, and thus constitutes the strongholds that Paul speaks of here. To solve these problems, whatever they may be in their specific manifestations, it is evident that we must deal with these two things. If Christians are going to be of any help at all in the struggle of the world with these gripping, baffling, perplexing, demanding, and destructive problems, they must come to grips with these two issues, these arguments must be overthrown and the pride that buttresses them must be humbled and brought low. And that, says the Apostle Paul, is what Christians, acting as individuals, are alone capable of doing. See his expression in Second Corinthians 10, Verses 4 and 5:

for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, {2 Cor 10:4-5 RSV}

Here the apostle brings into view the weapons of the Christian. He implies that they are clearly not the weapons of the world. These unworldly weapons are, as we have already seen, truth, love, righteousness, and faith-prayer. And it is important to see, as we have suggested before, that these weapons find their effectiveness in the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, that is what the apostle is talking about. The gospel is the proclamation of truth, the demonstration of love and righteousness, and the operation of faith-prayer. You have not the gospel if these four elements are not present, and you cannot have them present in any human activity without having proclaimed and demonstrated the gospel. They are interchangeable, identical things.

That is why, when the Apostle Paul came to Corinth (that great city in which the church to which he addressed was located), he found in it men and women who were in the grip of serious social problems: sexual perversion, sexual license, racial divisions, family feuds, political tyranny, etc. -- all the problems we know today were present in Corinth. What did he say about his approach? Here he comes to a city, with its love of philosophy, and its love of human wisdom, and he throws down a gauntlet unmistakably. He says, "For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified" {cf, 1 Cor 2:2}. That is what you need, that is the message that can help you.

In declaring that message, he was declaring the truth about life and about God. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" stands at the very heart of life; nothing can be understood properly apart from it. That is what the apostle means. With that message he also demonstrated the love of his heart in his willingness to die for himself for their sake, to meet their physical and spiritual needs. He lived before them a wholesome, well-adjusted life, free from tension and stress, balanced in every way, a whole person. This made an impression upon these people. They saw in Paul a clear example of what he was talking about. He lived a right life. Also he prayed for them, as he himself declared, in the expectation that God would do great things for them and to change them, to open their eyes and make them see life as it really was. In other words, he declared the truth, he demonstrated love, he lived a righteous life, and he practiced constantly prayer for these people. Thus he declared the gospel, and, in that way, the apostle destroyed their arguments, he lowered their pride, delivered them and set them free. These also are the weapons by which he proposed attacking the strongholds he yet found entrenched in this church in Corinth.

It is tremendously important for us to see that the Christian approach to these arguments by which they were entrenched in society, is not to try and destroy the arguments with counter-arguments. Paul says:

- I did not come to argue with you, or to discuss philosophy.
- I did not come to bandy about the wisdom of the world, or to argue with you on the basis of one viewpoint versus another, or one human authority against another.
- I came to introduce a new element.

Here is where the Christian must see the uniqueness of his position. Each of us is capable of introducing into any situation in which we find ourselves, a totally new element, a radical difference. This is what happened across to Christians who are immersed in a pessimistic fog of despair. There is a radical difference introduced into the gospel; a unique element is introduced into life. Paul puts it in one phrase, it is the truth about the person of Jesus Christ. The word of the cross, he says, "is the power of God unto salvation," {Rom 1:16 KJ}

It was that word of the cross, that truth about Jesus, coupled with love and righteousness and faith that did the trick here in Corinth. And it is the only thing that will do the trick in our world today. On every hand we see the leaders of thought who are sick and tired of the empty panaceas that men have been trying for centuries. They do not work. They merely quiet something here for the moment, only to have it break out again in another way. The world of our day is eloquent witness to the truth of that statement. How, then, does the Christian destroy and destroy arguments? Perhaps we need to analyze this more closely, since we need to understand the power of the Word of God in any human situation. After all, this gospel is not addressed to religious people. The gospel is addressed to the world in its desperate need, and therefore it is designed to do something about the need of the world.

How does it do it? The apostle says, in two ways. He lists two steps here:

- The first: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God." We must first (literally), we destroy these two things: arguments and pride.
- Second, we capture every thought to obey Jesus Christ.

I shall limit myself today only to the first of these. We will consider this very carefully, because he is coming to the very heart of the apostle's whole argument. We must understand just how the gospel is to change society.

The first thing it does, the apostle says, is to destroy or pull down arguments and pride. But it does so not by an overwhelming counterattack against these arguments, we have already established that, but by a process of undermining them. In other words, the gospel does not attack the reasonings of men; it does not simply a debate, or a dialogue even. The gospel is not an attempt to answer argument with counter-argument, or merely to expose the error in reasoning of those who offer false views of life. The gospel does not do that. Instead, it assaults the man behind the argument. That is the way it works. Instead of destroying the philosophy directly, the gospel captures the philosopher, and thus destroys the philosophy. It is very important that we see this plainly. The gospel undermines arguments by capturing the arguer behind the argument to change the man. When that happens, you not only have ended the argument, you have gained the man as a proponent for an entirely different view of life, changed him drastically and dramatically.

There are several ways in which this takes place. You can see it confirmed in life around you, and it is illustrated very plainly and clearly in the Scriptures.

First, the gospel addresses itself to the vacuums created in the heart of man by the very arguments which he supports his false ideas. In other words, it declares truth which lies beyond the reach of these arguments of men.

I was interested this week to read a review of C. S. Lewis' writings by a man who, though he was a Christian, was taking the position of an atheistic reviewer. In reviewing Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*, which is his basic explanation of the Christian message, this reviewer said, from an atheistic point of view:

It is most disconcerting to have one's case against Christianity well in hand, only to find that Lewis doesn't give the answers we expect to refute.

Yes, it is disconcerting. It throws them, it puzzles them. They do not understand what you are doing. It is the heart of the gospel. It reveals things men do not know, and yet which they sense are true. The gospel addresses itself to the vacuums in men's life which are not covered by their specious, reasoned arguments.

Let me show you what I mean:

Every man or woman without Christ, from the biblical point of view, is living, essentially, a limited, narrowed, one-dimensional life. Or, it is at best, two-dimensional. Most people, I find, are one-dimensional in their thinking. Life has length for all of us. We live out the years between our birth and our death, that is the length of life. For many people that is about all you can say of them -- they just make it from day to day. It is merely a process of eating, sleeping, and going through the usual chores, and that is about it. For some, life also has breadth, i.e., there is a wide range of interests they develop, and of experiences they go through. It is possible for man without God to have two dimensions in his life; that of length, and that of breadth.

But when man lives without Christ, and, therefore without the knowledge of God, life for him has no depth. Life is shallow, lived in the surface. It may be broad, but it is shallow; it has no depth. I find many people who confuse breadth with depth. They think that because they are educated and have a vast range of interests in many subjects and things, that this constitutes depth. But this is not depth; it is breadth. Many times what they need to do is to broaden their interests and to find new hobbies, new projects, new things to do. It is not depth; it is breadth.

It is to these hidden hungers that the gospel speaks. It makes marvelous appeal and reaches behind arguments. After all, the arguments find expression only in the two dimensions with which man is familiar. The non-Christian thinks this is all there is to life and he has marshaled all his defenses in these two dimensions. But the gospel pays little attention to these. It speaks to that third realm, and, therefore, gets right to the very heart of the man, behind the arguments. It does not try to answer them, does not try to reach them -- there is a time and place for that later -- but it simply speaks to the hungers in man.

Those hungers are very evident in our world today. I ran across a quotation not long ago from a poem, *The Rock*, that expresses them very powerfully. He says,

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
And all our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the life we have lost in living?

There are a lot of people asking that question today: Where is the life we have lost in living? Their lives are shallow, lived only on the surface, lacking the depth, the richness, that God alone can give. But that is not the way man was designed. The biblical view of the relationship of man and God is expressed in one sense in a verse from the 47th Psalm, "Deep calleth unto deep," {Psa 42:7 KJV}. That is what man is to be in relation to God: The deeps in man are to cry out to the deeps in God and find fulfillment and satisfaction. The shallow life is creating the restlessness and the surging agony of life we see around us on every side today.

Now the gospel presents evidence of this third dimension to man. It says new things, startling things, remarkable things, frightening things, to the man who does not know God, to the man who lives only in two dimensions. Therefore the gospel puzzles him, and challenges him; it makes him think even when he does not want to think, even when he thinks that he has thought about everything. That is why we do not speak these truths, for they are powerful in their ability to challenge the thinking of men and women.

I want to illustrate this in a contemporary way. Just this week I heard a story that was an excellent illustration of this power of the gospel to challenge the defenses of those who are opposed to God, and yet for which they have no defense. Since I have been in Palo Alto, one of the greatest citadels of anti-Christianity that I know of has been the course in *History of Western Civilization* at Stanford University. I have seen the faith of many a young Christian undermined by that course. In many ways it has a great deal of value to those who do not at all deplore the teaching of it -- it is an excellent subject, but the way it is taught is oftentimes destructive to weak Christian faith. I learned this week of the experience of a young man who is a member of a church, and who is a student in a class on Western Civilization. What took place there is most interesting and illustrating the very things I am talking about. I want to introduce to you Steve Newman, and ask him to come and tell us what happened to him.

(Report by Mr. Newman)

About two months ago I began praying that God would give me some kind of opportunity in my Western Civ class to present the gospel clearly. I knew that the teacher wouldn't do so, and that the textbooks wouldn't do so, and I knew that if I just made a few statements in class they could be twisted in the minds of those who heard them. So I started praying, and got a lot of other people praying. About three weeks before we came to the section on Jesus, the teacher asked for volunteers to lead class discussions. Immediately after class I went up and volunteered to lead the class discussion on the *Life and Teachings of Jesus*. This was the answer to my prayer, right there. Then I started really praying that God would help me and show me what to say to them.

The week before we got to this. I was reading in my textbook on the Old Testament, and the author made several statements doubting the reliability of the Old Testament. He said that Isaiah was written by two people, and the second half was written after the Babylonian exile, which would make a lot of it history instead of prophecy, that Daniel was written in the

second century, B.C., instead of the sixth century, and he interpreted it so that it would be history, instead of prophecy. This kind of stuff shook me a little bit, so I called up Dave Roper and had him bring over his books from the seminary. He spent all morning before class indoctrinating me and feeding me full of information. I went into class with a stack of books up to here, told the teacher I had done some research, and asked if I could present what I found. He said "Yes," so I went through first the things that would back up this view of the "second" Isaiah, and then gave refutations of all these arguments. Then I went through the things that support the late-dating of Daniel, refuted all of them, then gave positive evidence for the early dating of both of these books, and showed how the author's interpretation of Daniel couldn't possibly be correct as to the four kingdoms, and his interpretation of the seventy weeks.

It all took about twenty minutes, and the people in the class were completely dumbfounded and baffled them completely. They could accept that I could challenge the text: this didn't step on their toes too much, since it was nothing but Old Testament prophecy. But then, the following Tuesday, I started to present the reliability of the New Testament (I got Dave Roper to help me again with this), presenting the proofs of the resurrection, and went through all the different theories to try to explain the empty tomb and I refuted them, and then went through how the resurrection appearances couldn't have been hallucinations. At this point the teacher got up out of his chair. He was really uneasy, and said, "Why, I just thought you were going to present all that stuff and say, 'Look, you've got to accept this on faith.' Here you go through presenting all this rational stuff." This really shook him up, and they tried to argue with me about how my argument on the resurrection was stupid because it was all based

2. Also, the resurrection of Jesus could never be explained except on terms of God at work doing unusual things, supernatural things.
3. As Steve also mentioned, there was an appeal to the basic need of man, his need of forgiveness, his need of finding freedom from guilt and fear. This is where the gospel has power. It comes from an unexpected way, gets behind his carefully erected defenses, very much like the attack upon France in World War II. They simply ignored the Maginot Line that had been erected against them.

doves," {cf, Matt 10:16}. That is the Christian approach. This is exemplified by the Apostle Paul in his letter when he says to these Corinthians, "being crafty I caught you with guile," {2 Cor 12:16}. I caught you in a way that you did not expect. I captured you by craftiness, and a very remarkable kind of craftiness.

We are trying to discover how this works in our own day. We have already seen one way in which it works.

First, as we saw last week, the gospel speaks to the vacuums in man's spirit which are not butted by the specious reasonings by which he tries to defend his pride. The gospel gets behind the defenses and speaks to the empty places in man's spirit, the vacuums. The gospel is a thoroughly supernatural message. i.e., it talks about things that are not subject to the explorations of science or the discoveries of modern scientific approaches. It speaks of relationships between God and man, the deep things of man's spirit. Since man was created by God to have this kind of a relationship, the gospel makes its silent appeal to the deepest hungers of man's heart and does so despite the arguments that he may have devised to protect himself. In fact, why, when the gospel is spoken in power, it raises certain fears within an individual and awakens certain longings within him.

I was told this week of a man -- the husband of a woman in this congregation -- who regularly tears up the messages when she brings them home. But he always reads them first! This is perfectly fine with me. It is remarkable that he never destroys them without reading them first. Surely this reveals something about man: He is longing for the expression of truth and his defenses will eventually crumble under that approach.

There is a verse in Ecclesiastes that is marvelously significant in this connection. It says "God has made everything beautiful in its time," {cf, Eccl 3:11a RSV}. Man always agrees with that. But then it goes on to say, "also he has put eternity into man's mind," {Eccl 3:11b RSV}. Man can never forget that. He is aware of his being, and he knows it. Despite the superficiality of his life there are cries from the depths of his heart. The gospel speaks to these cries.

it makes its subtle appeal to his heart. These foul results of evil in human life create bondage. The

but he involves himself in long hours of patient, wearying, listening and help. As a result, he reached a young man and won him for Christ. He, in turn, has become a powerful instrument for awakening people to the dangers of drugs and to introduce them to the means of deliverance in Jesus Christ.

That could not have been done without an act of committed, sacrificial, love. These acts are what the gospel has done in the hearts and lives of many. That is why we have listed in the bulletin these opportunities for help, and ask you seriously to consider opening your homes, or involving your lives in any way to help. This is none other than what the Lord Jesus himself asks of us. If we are going to present the message in all its full-orbed power, it must be done with the accompaniment of acts of love which require our involvement.

Third, the gospel destroys arguments and humbles pride by presenting the indisputable record of the lives of the saints. It produces righteousness in people, undeniably. Here is where the weapons of righteousness are used "on the right hand and on the left," {2 Cor 6:7b KJV}. The gospel has demonstrated that it works and changes people. That record has power to break down arguments and to humble pride.

There are a thousand illustrations of this that can be given right out of this congregation. There are people here this morning because they saw in their wife a completely changed person when she came to know Jesus Christ. There are wives who are here because their husbands, or sons, or daughters, were remarkably different, when they came to know Jesus Christ.

The Scripture uses a beautiful phrase to describe the consistent life of a believer: "the beauty of holiness" {1 Chr 16:29, 2 Chr 20:21, Psa 29:2, 96:9}. There is no beauty like it; that marvelous charm in a life that is right, balanced, wholesome, that is dedicated, committed to the Son of God. The beauty of holiness is nothing else like it. It is powerfully compelling to unbelievers. You can feel it when you read the life of a saint like John Bunyan, or a modern saint like Jim Elliot. There are compelling stories when you see something of the lives of the saints. You can hear this quality in some of the hymns we sing, those particularly by Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, or John Newton. How many have sensed it in the ~~Amazing Grace~~ ~~Amazing Grace~~

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found;
was blind, but now I see.

I suppose the classic illustration of this powerful appeal of the gospel is the story of the experience of the patron saint and mentor, Dr. H. A. Ironside. Many of you know that for years he was a captain of the Salvation Army in San Francisco. He told me that frequently the Salvation Army would march down Broadway Street and hold open-air meetings down by the Ferry Building. I don't know

gone wrong at its very base.

I want to reserve for a full message the last method by which the gospel destroys arguments and pride, the method of faith-prayer.

Let me close now by reminding you of those stirring words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the capital of the Roman empire, the center of the world of their day. In the 13th chapter of Romans with these words. I give them to you in Phillips' rendering:

The night is nearly over; the day has almost dawned. Let us therefore fling away the things that men do in the dark; let us arm ourselves for the fight of the day! Let us live cleanly, as in the daylight, not in the "delights" of getting drunk or playing with sex, nor yet in quarreling or jealousies. Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling. {Rom 13:12-14 J. B. Phillips}

Prayer

Our Father, these stirring words challenge our hearts. How sick our world is. How desperately it needs the healing remedy that flows from our Lord Jesus Christ. How dark it has become; how noticeably, even in this last year, darkness has settled upon people everywhere. Lord, we thank you for the light that streams from the cross and the tomb of Lord Jesus, and ask that we may declare this message in its full power, its full-orbed ability to change, to deliver, and to free men from themselves. We ask in Christ's name, Amen.

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THE SECRET GOVERNMENT OF EARTH

by Ray C. Stedman

It would be provincial on our part not to have some comment on the event that has occurred for a week will be forever famous in history -- man's first trip to the moon. We cannot help but be grateful for the safe return of these three brave men who ventured out on this perilous journey into space. The meticulous preparation that was necessary to make this possible, still (as any of the astronauts have been first to acknowledge), something could easily have gone wrong and these men would never have returned to earth again. We are grateful that God has allowed that return to take place. We are grateful, too, that they found it fitting that the first message to come to this planet from outer space was the words of Genesis. It was a most appropriate message.

But I cannot help but be concerned about certain aspects of this venture and perhaps you share the concern. I am concerned that this achievement, remarkable as it is, will contribute to man's insane confidence that he is capable of solving all the riddles of life and of the universe, apart from God. These scientific achievements have a way of doing that to the corporate thought of mankind, making them feel that man is capable of solving out all his problems. But let us remember that this was a problem in the technological realm only, and in that realm man has shown considerable brilliance. But technology is a far cry from the solution of the deeper issues of life. Perhaps we do not have too much to worry about in this respect. I remember one of the astronauts during the flight of the Apollo 8, to the effect that this was a most propitious time for this to happen, perhaps at the critical moment, because now we will have some place to go when things get into trouble on earth!

My second area of concern about Apollo 8's flight is that, in sinful ignorance, man will find some of this knowledge and experience to create even more awesome and destructive instruments of terror than he already possesses. This is a very real possibility growing out of this space exploration. What horrors may swing over our heads in 1970, or some other year in the near future, because of this? But this brings us back to the subject of our morning studies together. If that happened, we would have one of those strongholds of evil that Paul has been speaking about in Second Corinthians 10 -- a stronghold which Christians and the Christian church are uniquely equipped to destroy.

I want to stress that again. What we are talking about in these messages from Second Corinthians concerning our warring against evil in its entrenched power in human life, is that in the gospel we have the only method by which these problems can be adequately solved. It is not one of many methods; it is the only one. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for this world. If the church is not saying that, no one else is. But that is supremely the message of the church to this world. The good news of Jesus Christ is the hope of working out these burning, pressing issues that confront us on every side, both in societal life and in the life of the individual. They are in society precisely because they are in the lives of individuals, and the gospel offers the only way out.

We are exploring in depth Paul's statement in Second Corinthians 10:5:

We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, {2 Cor 10:5a RSV}

and we have been looking together at how the weapons of the Christian (truth, love, righteousness, faith-prayer), operate to destroy these arguments, and to human pride, the independent pride which is the evil in any form today, and thus to eliminate these terrible problems of society. Now we have come to the study of the ways in which the gospel does this. We have considered

- How truth works,
- How love works,
- How righteousness works, and
- Now we come to the use of the weapon of faith-prayer.

I remind you again of what we have already seen, that faith, in this context, is confidence that God will intervene in the affairs of men. It is a belief that there is around us an unseen kingdom which does intervene in the affairs of men and does not hesitate to intervene in these affairs. It is that intervention that is the power behind prayer. Prayer itself is nothing. Prayer is merely a means of communication. Prayer is nothing of itself; but, in the wisdom of God, prayer is the means that God has ordained by which His activity forces are brought into play directly upon the situations that prevail in society and in the lives of individuals. Prayer is the request for divine intervention, based upon certain promises that God has made.

Throughout the whole record of history this has been a powerful weapon to change circumstances. Faith-prayer destroys strongholds and humbles pride by calling into activity forces superior to those of the "principalities and powers," those "world rulers of present darkness" {cf, Eph 6:12} which Paul describes in Ephesians 6, which are behind these strongholds of evil. Therefore by the prayer of faith you are attacking the source of these problems. You can see clearly, then, in this respect at least, why the apostle would say, "the weapons of our warfare are not worldly," {2 Cor 10:4a RSV}. They are not according to the flesh. The man of the world does not believe in prayer; he thinks it is a joke. He thinks it is some kind of magic abracadabra which Christians indulge in order to psychologically bolster their sagging spirits. Prayer meetings are a joke. They are nice for Christians, if they believe that kind of stuff, but no one individual can do so. This is why the apostle so clearly states the fact that the weapons that we use are not the world's weapons, but they are mighty! They destroy strongholds. They accomplish what the world's weapons do not and cannot accomplish.

If there is anything we will all get out of this present series of studies together, I hope it is a renewed confidence in the weapons that are at our disposal, a renewed sense of the power of a Christian

promise of God was that the nation should remain in captivity for seventy years and those years were now drawing to a close, Daniel laid hold of the promise and prayed a mighty pra

according to his will. This is the problem with many of us. We pray, and then we start thinking, "see. If God would do this, or move that; if he would just change this person, then it would all work then expect it to happen according to our plans. When it does not happen that way then we say, prayers are not answered." But God has his own way of doing things.

Yet, we can expect results in prayer. As the Lord Jesus himself told us, prayer follows certain categories, certain divisions. There are three kinds of prayer, reflected in those words, "Ask ... seek ... knock," which fit three different types of situations. But in every case, Jesus himself said that the results were the same: "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened," {cf, Matt 7:7}. To prevent us from missing the point, he went on to say, "Everyone that asks, shall receive; and he that seeks, shall find; and to him that knocks, it shall be opened," {cf, Matt 7:8}. Let us take those words seriously and remember that God means exactly what he says. If we pray along the lines he has taught us, we can be confident of our results.

How does prayer change things? What, specifically, does prayer do in certain situations? I want to share with you now three major ways in which prayer operates, that we might be clear about what God will do in response to prayer:

1. First, prayer is intended to open blinded minds and hearts. The problem with most of the situations that occur in our lives, both socially and individually, is that we act out of ignorance. We are unaware of the factors involved in a situation. That blindness is apparent on every side. I am continually astonished by the way the leaders and thinkers of our nation and of the world seem to be blind to the fundamental fact of human evil. It is amazing to me how they repeatedly seem to feel that the actions of a group of people will act differently than they will as individuals. It seems to be a clear matter of simple logic: Individuals act in a certain way; when you put them in a group they will continue to act in that same way. They do not act differently. They cannot suddenly reverse themselves and be different people: they act in the same way. These leaders, statesmen, and editorialists seem to be as blind to the selfishness and brutality of nations, and the presence in society of war and riot, yet they are blind to their own inability to eliminate arguments, selfishness, and passion in their own homes. These all arise from exactly the same source. That is clearly an evidence of the blindness that is the thinking of men.

This blindness is evident also in the fantastic proposals that are being made today to cure the mental illnesses of men. I read just this last week a most amazing but very serious proposal by certain scientists to screen the chromosomes of babies and thus detect latent abnormalities in their genetic structure. They would then register these babies and watch them. As they grew up and began to show aggressive tendencies or hostile attitudes they would be provided with certain pills to take when they felt an attack of aggression coming on. Or, in the absence of pills, these scientists seriously propose that such people could be fitted with individual power packs, attached to various areas of their bodies with buttons to press to offset any attack of hostility that might be forthcoming. That is very serious! That is how blind people can be!

But prayer has an amazing power to remove the blindfolds from men's eyes and to allow men and women to see themselves as they really are -- perhaps only momentary glimpses of what is true, "moments of truth," but they are very helpful opportunities to see themselves and others as they are realistically, in true focus, as they appear in the eyes of God.

Read the prayers of the Apostle Paul and you will find that this is the predominant emphasis in his prayers. He is always praying that eyes might be opened. He says, "I bow my knees before our Lord Jesus Christ" {cf, Eph 3:14}, praying for you Ephesians, "that the eyes of your hearts might be enlightened," {cf, Eph 1:18}. His prayer is that they might see. In Ephesians, Chapter 3, Paul prays that they might "have power to comprehend" {Eph 3:18a RSV}, power to understand. This is one of the major accomplishments of prayer, this ability to open blinded eyes and hearts so they can see reality.

This last week I heard the story of a husband who was drifting in unbelief and in his ignorance

sinfulness, was beginning to destroy himself and his family. His wife and two friends began

That is the result that you can expect from prayer for those in high positions, "that we may have a peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way." That is first in the warfare that Paul is leading this young man to wage in this pagan city. Then he goes on in Verse 8 to say,

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, no ladies' prayer meetings]

can be solved without violence; without the explosive damage that is caused by the overflow of p

How much do we believe this? I have entitled this ~~The Secret Government of Earth~~ ^{beta} because that is what the church really is. It is God's secret community, spread throughout the earth at every level, designed to bring to bear powerful forces to control the affairs and events of men, in line with God's purposes, and thus to bring about things in the affairs of earth that would never otherwise happen.

Do you think of yourself that way, as part of the secret government of earth?

What an honor when a man is appointed by the President to go to Washington and have a part in the government of earth. Yet, in a sense, that is but a puppet government. All earthly governments are subject to powers behind the scene. But a church prayer meeting can be a far more effective force about peace and order in a community or a nation than a meeting of the leaders of the Pentagon, the Chiefs of Staff. That is the revelation of the Scripture.

If we do not utilize this amazing power, we are like soldiers attacking a strong fortress who have their cannon available to them that could knock down the doors of the fortress, but they never use it. They keep peppering away at the walls with popguns. That is the church that does not utilize this power of prayer.

My challenge to you in 1969 is to pray.

Concentrate on the Bay Area and make this Bay Area, under God, an island of peace in the midst of violence, as a testimony to the power of God to control violence among men.

Prayer

Our Father, help us to take these things seriously. Surely we can see how seriously the apostles and the early Christians took them, and what mighty results obtained as they believed in you and acted. Forgive us our unbelief, Father; forgive us our self-indulgence; our refusal to take seriously your words and to act upon them and our carping complaints because things don't go right; our fears and anxieties as we see events disintegrating and deteriorating around us while we refuse to employ the weapons you have given us to use. God grant that we may see ourselves as we are, and change these things in 1969. We ask in His name, Amen.

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BRINGING THOUGHTS INTO CAPTIVITY

by Ray C. Stedman

We have arrived at that magic moment called the end. This is the final message in our present series. We have been looking together at the relationship of the Christian to the struggles that occupy men in this world, and we have been doing so in the light of the passage found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 10, which deals with the weapons of our warfare and their ability to destroy strongholds.

We looked first at the nature of our weapons. "The weapons of our warfare are not worldly," Paul says, "but they have divine power ..." {2 Cor 10:4 RSV}. We examined the nature of these weapons of the Christian

are not fleshly (that is the literal word the apostle employed) or worldly. We saw from other Scriptures they consist of truth, of love, of righteousness, and of faith-prayer. But, we further saw, they are effective. They are not weak weapons, not ineffective. The world does not regard them as mighty eyes of God they are, and the passage of history has proved that they are the one thing that accomplishes results, they are mighty.

Then we looked at the strength of the opposition. We saw that the apostle shows us the reason so many "strongholds," these heavy problems in life, these tough, difficult, knotty problems. It is because they are buttressed, or supported, first of all, by arguments, rationalizations, and reasonings which may be logical and thus give strength and solidity to evil. We saw that behind all this is the heart of the human pride, pride which in its essence is independence against God; "that high thing," says Paul, "which is itself against the knowledge of God," {cf, 2 Cor 10:5}. That is the basic trouble with the world. It is not nationalism, it is not racism. It is not the color of the skin nor the national origin that creates the problems; it is the human heart. It is the pride of man that fancies he can get along without God.

Then we saw that the effect of Christian warfare is, first of all, to destroy these arguments and to humble it by the preaching of the gospel, the manifestation of truth, love, righteousness, and faith.

Now we have come to the last two effects that the warfare of the believer produces, in this or that effect of Christian warfare is, as I have said, to destroy arguments and pride. The second one is given in the latter part of Verse 5, "and take every thought captive to obey Christ," {2 Cor 10:5 RSV}. The first is given in Verse 6, "being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete," {2 Cor 10:6 RSV}.

Let us now consider together this second effect of the Christian's warfare at work in society. The first is to pull down arguments and pride, but the second one is linked to it: It is to take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ. This is extremely important. If we do not understand this second step we shall not be able to carry out the first one. It will have no ultimate effect in our lives, either as individuals or in society. We must be careful to understand it.

In developing this second step I want to be more personal and individual in application than I have been in the others. Up to now we have focused primarily on the great burning problems of our society. But this second step, in its very nature, takes place within the mind. It is a capturing of every thought for Christ, and is in its application, personal. It is something we must experience in ourselves before we can apply it to others. In a sense that is true of everything we have said in this series, but it is particularly so here.

How shall we explore together what Paul means by this phrase, "taking every thought captive to obey Christ?"

First, let us look at it to see how it relates to the first effect of Christian warfare, destroying arguments and pride. In relation to that, this second one is a mopping-up operation. You remember the figure the apostle is employing here: He is talking about assaulting a castle, a strong, mighty fortress, defended and entrenched. The first thing that is necessary is to break down those defenses, to destroy the walls and render the fortress and to render it unable to fight. That, says Paul, is done by divine power: "the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power ..." {2 Cor 10:4 RSV}. They are God at work. Only God can destroy arguments and pride. Only God can answer these specious reasonings and arguments. Only he can capture the mind. That is God's work, through the gospel.

But now there comes a second step which is the Christian's responsibility. It is necessary, in capturing a fortress, after you have destroyed the walls and moved into the center of the fortress, to root out the remaining pockets of resistance. There will be enemy soldiers that have hidden away in the depths of the fortress, in the dungeons and obscure corners, and these must be rooted out and taken captive. The whole job will have to be done all over again very shortly. We cannot do the first thing in our own power. It takes God's power to get behind the problems of men and to destroy human pride. This God does through the word of the cross, the word about Jesus, crucified on our behalf. But we must do this other thing. We must take each vagrant thought and capture it for Christ.

said to the man, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," {cf, John 5:8}. That is the way God acts in his life; he does not have to depend on any human resource. He immediately speaks, and the work is done. The man looked at this stranger, and, somehow sensing that here was One who knew what he was talking about, he began to obey. He did what he could not do, and what he could not have done for thirty-eight years. To obey the Lord Jesus, he tried to take up his bed and walk. The moment he started to obey, power came into his legs and arms, and he arose and began to leap, around praising God for what had happened.

That is the way God breaks the power of pride or evil in our lives. This is that divine power which comes when we come to him with some kind of a hang-up, or problem; perhaps some habit that has gripped and grasped us, and held us. We bring it to him, and he sets us free.

But that is not the end of the story. The man left and went back to his home rejoicing, but we are told a little later Jesus found him in the temple. Our Lord sought him out for he knew where the man would have had to go to the temple to offer thanksgiving and ritual sacrifices for being cleansed of his illness. Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him these significant words, "Behold, you are made whole." Jesus never says that to a man who is not made whole; when he says it, it is true. "Behold, you are made whole no more, lest a worse thing come upon you," {cf, John 5:14}. What did he mean? He is saying, "Learn to obey now. It was disobedience that brought you into this relationship and held you for thirty-eight years. Now, having been set free, you must address yourself to learning what God wants and how he wants you giving yourself to him -- lest a worse thing come upon you." Thus we must learn to bring every thought captive to Christ or else the whole job will have to be done over again, and, perhaps, we will have to die in its possibility by that time.

Surely here is the problem with many. It is absolutely essential that we see that once Christ has set us free, whatever it may be, if we do not begin to bring captive every thought into obedience to him we will fall back in the same place again.

The third observation is that this is nothing but the practical acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the life. I have noticed through the years that the intellectual life is often the last part of a Christian's life to the right of Jesus Christ to rule. Somehow we love to retain some area of our intellect, of our will, reserved from the control of Jesus Christ. For instance, we reserve the right to judge Scripture, and we will or will not agree with, what we will or will not accept. I find many Christians struggling in this area.

One of our women told us, a few years ago, of a struggle in this respect in her life. She said she had read through the New Testament and sometimes write in the margin opposite a verse, "I don't agree!" She was honest enough to put it down in writing. There are many of us who do not agree but we do not write it down, or even admit it to ourselves. It was honest of her to do that, but it represents a struggle with the Lordship of Christ; his right to rule over every area of life, his right to control the thought-life, even when we are taken captive to obey him.

Sometimes that is manifest by permitting ourselves an inward indulgence while repressing the outward expression of it. That is very common. I find it in my own life, and I am sure you do in yours. Many of us have lustful thoughts and pictures over and over on the record player of the mind, but do not allow them to engage in the immoral acts involved. What is that? It is a refusal to bring captive every thought to Christ. Sooner or later we shall find ourselves in a situation where the act that we thought we had been committed before we know it. That is what accounts for so many of the moral failures of those who were thought to be strong Christians.

Others manifest that reserve by allowing jealous thoughts and resentful attitudes to take over the thought-life of the mind. Though they outwardly appear to be friendly and cooperative with people, inwardly they are filled with hostility and resentment against them. They do not like them, do not want to have anything to do with them, and seethe with inward resentment. But that is a direct refusal to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. It is refusing to bow to the right of Jesus Christ to be Lord over that area of life.

We often do this by permitting ourselves the luxury of self-pity or self-righteousness, while all the while maintaining a facade of spirituality and piety. Perhaps there is no hypocrisy more abhorrent than this.

what our Lord attacked most scorchingly, the self-righteousness of those who indulge in inward self-aggrandizement and exaltation but outwardly have a very pious and spiritual attitude. Surely, the failure of many. That is why we are unable to destroy strongholds. We bring them to Christ, and the power of them in our life, but unless we set ourselves to capturing every thought to be obedient we are right back in it again. Any degree of this is intellectual disobedience to Jesus Christ and will land us back in the bed of impotence and weakness that we have occupied for too many years already.

Dr. Francis Schaeffer has put it very accurately beautifully in these words:

There were some in Corinth who were challenging the apostle's authority, and this whole section is about that challenge. Some of them were saying, "He writes very sternly and threateningly when he's away, but when he's with us he never carries it out. He is always meek and mild when he comes." They accused Paul of inconsistency. Paul is dealing here with the role of punishment in correcting the problems of the individual and also those of society. In effect, what he is saying to these Corinthians is, when you have bowed the knee in recognition of the right of Jesus to be Lord over every area of your life then I'll be ready, even eager, to punish your disobedience!

There are three things I would like to state about that:

First, this is clearly an ironic statement. These Corinthians viewed him as being eager to punish them now. They thought he was but waiting to get hold of them, that he was threatening them. But he says, "No, it isn't that I want to punish you, I don't want to do so at all. I will if I must, and don't think

punishment makes you take things seriously, then the light has a chance to shine upon your life and what is wrong. Then, if you will take it captive for Jesus Christ, bring every thought into obedience

As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

God, makes its appeal to human reason, as in that well known passage from the prophet Isaiah:

"Come now, let us reason together,
says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool," {Isa 1:18 RSV}

The emphasis again and again is laid upon the necessity of using the mind, the intelligence, to grasp and explore the revelation of God.

We read in several places in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul opened the Scriptures and read his hearers out of them. The writers of Scriptures everywhere address themselves to normal logic and rationality in the giving of the revelation of God.

Now, it is true that the facts which are incorporated in this magnificent disclosure of God are so difficult for us to grasp. Sometimes they seem incredible to human minds. But the problem is not the revelation. The problem is what we are going to be examining in this message -- the faulty reason. The problem is the weakness of human reason. Once the experiment of faith is performed, the very matter which accepts revelation as a perfectly proper subject of human comprehension and study, then the matter of revelation is discovered to be utterly reasonable. And for the Christian there is nothing more confirmatory of the divine origination of this revelation than the constant discovery he experiences of the reasonableness of what Scripture says. As he puts it to the test of life he discovers it is utterly reasonable.

Well then, what is wrong? Why does the apostle warn us against human wisdom and human knowledge? It is exactly what it is that Paul says in this letter to the Colossians. His warning is addressed against knowledge, not wisdom in itself -- but the love of wisdom. It is that particular aspect of wisdom which is warning against; in other words, the supreme confidence in human wisdom or knowledge as an utterly reliable means of discovering truth. It is this love of wisdom which is the danger.

If you know your Bible, you will recognize immediately that there are other, similar warnings in Scripture. We are warned against the love of money: The apostle says, "The love of money is the root of all evil, 1 Timothy 6:10a}. This has often been misquoted as "Money is the root of all evil." No, there is nothing wrong with money. Money is the perfectly legitimate possession of a Christian, as well as anyone else. It is not money that is the problem; it is the love of money. It is not knowledge that is the problem; it is the love of knowledge, the supreme confidence, the arrogant assurance, that the human mind is all it takes to discover and know about life. This is the problem.

You see, this is the basic assumption of philosophy. It is true that human knowledge is a remarkable thing in discovering truth. Who would deny that? All we need as witness to that is the phenomenal scientific discoveries of our day, and the vast numbers of gadgets and gimmicks and creature comforts which have come to us as a result of the explorations and probings of science into the universe. But what the apostle is warning us against is that human knowledge, in any form, is never a completely reliable, or even remotely adequate, way of comprehending and encompassing truth. It is right here that philosophy makes a very definite claim in the opposite direction. The basic assumption of philosophers is that by using a process of inductive reasoning, by approaching life as it is, no matter what field of life is in view, they are confident that they can measure the relationship of one fact to another and arrive at an explanation of the purpose of life and the process of fulfillment.

The Bible cuts exactly across that and says it is impossible. We need to make this very, very clear. The revelation of God, from beginning to end, cuts exactly across that and says it can never be accomplished by the human mind in its fallen condition. The reason that it can never be accomplished is that the mind of man, in its fallen, is sinful, and therefore is completely inadequate and often unreliable. And to suggest that we can comprehend all the truth of the universe around us with the distorted and twisted instruments that we call human minds is like trying to suggest we can repair a very fine watch with a broken monkey wrench.

totally inadequate tool.

Now, you notice that the apostle does not say that it is wrong for Christians to read philosophy. It suggests that. There may be very adequate and legitimate reasons for the study of philosophy. But Paul's saying is, "Do not be deceived by philosophy." That is, do not give yourselves to agreement with the underlying, basic presupposition of philosophy, which I have already outlined. "Beware lest any man deceive you," for you cannot, at one and the same time, believe that the human mind is capable of amassing knowledge, properly evaluating truth and arriving at justifiable and legitimate conclusions, and also believe the revelation of God throughout the Scriptures that the mind of man is in such a condition that it is unable to open itself to God. You cannot hold those positions simultaneously.

This is a very basic challenge. It is one or the other. It is not a "both/and" but an "either/or" proposition. That is why Paul makes it so very clear to these Greek Christians that they must make a choice. Are they to stand on the revelation which they have found in Jesus Christ, who presents the only credentials that have ever adequately supported a claim to be the great revelation of God? Or are they to choose to rest on the flimsy, unsupported, and, if the Bible be true, unreliable conclusions of faulty and finite human minds? The choice always where the choice lies. Ultimate authority is the final question in life. And here is where the apostle throws down the gauntlet.

Here are two areas where this weakness of human intellect is especially noticeable:

- In man's thinking about God, and
- In man's thinking about himself.

In the letter to the Corinthians, the apostle makes very clear that it is impossible to arrive at a knowledge of God by human thinking: "The world by wisdom knows not God," {cf, 1 Cor 1:21}. It cannot know God because it does not have the equipment to know. For, as Paul goes on to argue, the things of God are only made known through the Spirit of God. God is such a completely different and greater being than we -- vast as the universe in character and nature lying outside of our experience -- that we cannot possibly understand him except as he chooses to disclose himself to us. Therefore the world by wisdom knows not God, except as man has the equipment to understand -- by the simplicity of faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ. "The natural man receives not the things of God, neither can he know them, because they are made known by the Spirit of God." {1 Cor 2:14}. Therefore there must be a spiritual rebirth. This is why Jesus laid it on the line so clearly that the great leader of the Jews, Nicodemus. He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," {cf, John 3:3}. There is no other way.

But, not only is this weakness noticeable in man's thinking about God, but also in man's thinking about himself -- for the great mystery of life is ourselves.

Someone said to me just recently, "The greatest problem in my life is me!" We all identify with that, don't we? The greatest mystery to us is ourselves. We do not know how we operate, we do not know how we think, we do not understand ourselves. We are continually doing those things which amaze us, which confuse and appall us. We all understand the apostle when he says in Romans 7, "The things that I do, those are the things that I do. And the things that I would do, I find myself unable to do," {cf, Romans 7:15}. This is a common experience of life, because man does not understand himself. So in these two areas the weakness of human intellect is very, very noticeable.

Now, human knowledge works reasonably well in other fields. The further you get from man and the periphery of knowledge, the more accurately human brains are able to understand and evaluate things and put things together. This is why in the realm of machinery and technology, etc., we do reasonably well. The fatal defect is still observable from time to time -- as witness the great blackout which spread over the northeastern states when man, confident that he had set up adequate safeguards to keep the electrical system going, suddenly discovered that it all backfired on him.

I wonder if there is not something in the nature of a parable in that incident? Man, thinking he has everything under control, possible to live in light, suddenly, unexpectedly, finds himself plunged into darkness! This is the story of our lives.

human history, again and again. Even in the realm of programming an organized approach to life, a wisdom is seen to be very faulty -- as witness the repeated instances when we heap up piles of wheat and other staples of life -- and burn them while people are starving to death all around us. What programs like this mean in the realm of politics.

But in questions of the ultimate meaning of existence, such as philosophy attempts to solve, human wisdom is a complete and abysmal failure. This is what the Bible declares and interestingly enough, what theologians themselves are coming to conclude today. I was interested to listening to Dr. Francis S. Schaeffer who was here recently from Switzerland. He has given himself to the study of philosophy from the Christian point of view. He made the very significant statement: "There are no more philosophies today; there are only anti-philosophies" -- by which he meant that philosophers have exhausted their resources. They have discovered they are bankrupt; they have no more ideas to explore. Now all the thinkers of the world are busy to write at great length about that bankruptcy and point out how there is nothing to discover any more in the areas yet unexplored, and thus to create what Schaeffer calls "anti-philosophy." In other words, all the clever proposals of men, seeking to find underlying explanations of life, have been proven to be exposed to be, empty and false.

Interestingly enough, this is exactly what the Apostle Paul says. Look at the passage in Colossians 2:8 that says "that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition." Luther's commentary demolishes all these theories as they are tried out in the implacable reality of living. As someone has said:

"There is no murder quite as tragic as that of a beautiful theory being done to death by a band of brutal fact."

Perhaps we might hope at last to run out of these ideas, but the pattern has proved otherwise. The pattern has been that the devil from time to time rejuvenates an old and almost forgotten theory, polishes it up, and runs it out as a "new and dramatic breakthrough" in human thought. And the men of the world run to it with awe and wonder, and say, "At last we have discovered the answer!" That again has been the story of human living.

You can see this assumption in the way philosophers, thinkers who proceed from this point of view, look at God's own revelation of himself, the Bible. They look at the Bible and say, "This is not God, speaking to men, as the Bible itself claims to be. No, this is nothing but the product of man's reasoning about God. We can see the implication of this, can you not? Man created this book; man is the total author of it. It is the product of man's reasoning about creation and the Creator. Man, therefore, is superior to it. From this presumption comes the study of what is called "comparative religion." All religions are products of man's reasoning, Christianity included. Therefore it is perfectly proper to line them up, compare them one with another, pick out what looks like the good things of each, and throw away the rest. Man sits as a judge. You can see this as the basic fault of man's thinking.

But the answer of the Bible to this is wholly different. Therefore it bears the mark that it does not have this distorted thinking of man. For the Bible declares again and again throughout its pages, in one place or another, what Paul says so plainly in First Corinthians 1 and 2: "Who can know the thoughts of a man? Who can know the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God," {cf, 1 Cor 2:11}. God is undiscoverable except as he reveals himself. "Who has known the mind of the Lord," says this mighty apostle, "or who has been his counselor?" {1 Cor 2:16a RSV}. Who has instructed God? Is he limited to man? God is greater by far than man. His thoughts, Isaiah says, are higher than man's thoughts; his ways, Paul says, are past finding out. The Lord Jesus takes exactly the same line. "No man knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him," {John 1:18 RSV}. There is no other way.

On one occasion Jesus prayed, "I thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, but you have revealed them unto babes," {cf, Luke 10:21}. That is why the gospel's words are so simple. "Except you be converted and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God," {Matt 18:3}.

In First Corinthians 3:18 the apostle says one of the greatest things on this very theme which has been spoken in the hearing of men: "Let no one deceive himself," {1 Cor 3:18a RSV}. This is the danger, that it is so easy to deceive ourselves along this line. We are always so exposed to this desire for exalting ourselves, patting ourselves on the back. Human nature is built that way.

A doctor once told me, "The first thing I learned about human nature was that when you pat it on the back, the head swells up!"

The apostle echoes that in First Corinthians 8, where he says, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies," {1 Cor 8:1b RSV}.

Here in Chapter 3 he says to the Corinthians, "Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you think that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise," {1 Cor 3:18 RSV}. What does that mean by that? Why, if any one thinks he knows something, is an authority in any field of knowledge, let him stop being a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, and become a fool in order that he might really become wise. Let him accept as fact what the world holds to be essentially foolish -- the revelation of God, the "foolishness" which Paul had preached among them. Perhaps this revelation is put most briefly in the opening words of the letter to the Hebrews:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, {Heb 1:1-2a RSV}

There it is: "by a Son." The great revelation of God is all contained in, and rests ultimately upon, the incarnation, the appearance in human life of the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself. And when a man believes that, when he casts aside his intellectual pride, when he humbles himself to the degree of the offer of Jesus to reveal himself to him and to change his life, that man then discovers for the first time that he has gained the equipment by which he may receive the revelation of God -- a regenerated spirit. The revelation of God, then, comes to us as a complete whole, challenging our minds to study and grasp it, to enter into it, then to let it seize upon our emotions and move us, and then to act. This is why the gospel makes

the whole of man -- such a tremendous presentation is found in this Book!

I would like to point out what certain men of faith and science have recognized -- that the revelation given to us in the Bible is another revelation very much on a par with that in nature, in the universe. It is a mystery to be understood, and explored, and then obeyed. This is what it is given for. God's revelation in the world as an unfolding of truth about himself and about man. And man is invited to handle it, and see if it really is from God. There is nothing wrong with that. We are invited to explore much as the Lord Jesus invited his disciples after his resurrection: "Handle me and see," {Luke 24:39} once we have seen that this is indeed from God, then we are to believe it. We are to give all our intellectual task of understanding it, of probing it, of analyzing it, of seeing what is really said, in order that it change our lives as dramatically as science has changed the world by exploring of the mysteries of the revelation in the universe:

- "But," someone says, "there is so much about the Bible that I can't understand." Of course you can't. What made you think you would be able to understand all of God in his self-revelation?
- Someone says, "I don't understand the Trinity." Of course you don't! I don't, either, but I believe. There are a lot of things I do not understand, but can still believe and act upon them.
- Someone says, "Well, I don't understand the mystery of the atonement -- how one person 1900 years ago, can do something for me." Of course you do not understand it. These are what Paul calls "the deep things of God" {1 Cor 2:10 KJV}, "the mysteries of God," {1 Cor 4:1}. We must believe.

Therefore, learn all you can. Explore every path of life. As the apostle says, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good," {1 Th 5:21 KJV}. God has ordained that these two forms of revelation shall work together to bring man to the knowledge of himself. So we desperately must have this written revelation of God to understand life.

Prayer

Our Father, we pray that the great themes which have occupied our attention today might challenge us to understand that life begins with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We cannot begin anywhere else. He is indeed the One "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And it is only to the believing heart, which lays aside its pride and stoops to drink of this great fountain of life, that there comes the clarifying of thought, the understanding of life, the deepening of human experience, the glorifying, according to thy mind and purpose, of the experiences of life. We pray that this may be the experience of all of us, that they may begin where the apostle began -- with Jesus Christ, and him crucified. We ask in his name, Amen.

Title: Faith and Modern Knowledge
Series: The Battle of Life
Scripture: Col 2:6-11
Message No: 8
Catalog No: 528
Date: January 9, 1966

A WORD TO THE WISE

by Ray C. Stedman

The letter to the Colossians was written from Rome by the Apostle Paul during his first imprisonment which occurs at the close of the book of Acts. Paul was living in his own rented house, chained to a guard day after day. He wrote to some people whom he'd never met, as far as we can tell. Colossae was in the Roman province of Asia, in present-day Turkey. The Christians in Colossae had been brought there and the church established there, by a man named Epaphras, who had ministered with the apostle and was concerned about them, and so he is writing to them about their spiritual welfare. I like this, because to me that we can include ourselves in this letter very easily. Paul has never visited our church either; we have never met Paul; neither have you; but he is writing to us. And what he has to say to us is very important because I am facing, and you are too, the same problems that these people in Colossae faced some two thousand years ago.

They were disturbed, first of all, about the evil that was rampant in their day. They were discouraged because it seemed as if evil had the upper hand. As the poet put it, "Truth forever on the scaffold; wrong forever on the throne." That is how it looked to them. Paul answers that in this letter by showing that Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God, and Lord over every force in the world, whether men realize it or not.

Some of these Colossians were deceived by legalism, by the notion that, if you really want to please God, you must give up certain practices, and observe rigid regulations in your life. Paul sets all that aside, and says that in Jesus Christ there is liberty. When you come to know him, your spirit is free. The motives of the law are

This is Paul's word: "Keep awake." But in that very practical way the apostle has, he tells you how to "Keep awake in it with thanksgiving," -- by means of thanksgiving. If, when you pray, you practice giving thanks to God for what he has given you, you will be much more alert and awake while you pray. As you practice thanksgiving -- as the Scriptures say, "In everything give thanks" {1 Th 5:18 KJV} -- you will discover that there are opportunities for prayer and thanksgiving in almost every situation you encounter.

The second thing Paul says about prayer is, "Include others in it." "Keep at it, and include others in it, especially me," he says. "Pray for us also that God may open to us a door for the word." Here he emphasizes the body of Christ and the fact that we are members one of another. We need each other. This gospel says that the opportunity for him to declare the message of Christ will be given to him by others: "Pray for me," he says, "and that will open a door. God will open a door when you pray for me."

The opportunity of opening doors for each others' ministry is given to every one of us. You can open a door for me; I can open a door for you -- if we pray for one another. Because prayer is addressed to God, He is able to open doors. Remember the scene John describes in the book of Revelation. He sees Jesus standing among the dead, Lord over every force the world knows, and with the keys of death and of hell hanging from his neck. And the Lord announces, "I am he who opens, and no man shuts, and shuts, and no man opens," {Revelation 3:7}. And as you and I support one another in prayer, "he who opens" will open up opportunities to us. And so the apostle says, "Pray for me, that I may have an open door and an opportunity to preach the gospel."

This is still true today. Doors are opened only as people pray for one another.

In anticipation of the forthcoming Billy Graham Crusade, letters and bookmarks and other notices have been circulated which bear this message from Billy Graham himself:

The secret of each crusade has been the power of God's Holy Spirit moving in answer to the prayer of millions of his people around the world. If we did not believe that there would be this same prayer support for the Northern California Crusade, we would not dare to attempt it. We are depending on your prayer support.

You can open a door for Billy Graham in this area if you pray for him. You can open a door for other people in your congregation, in their ministries in neighborhoods and other places, if you pray for them. God will work through you into human hearts, if you pray for one another. This is what the apostle is stressing here. How great is his own need in this regard!

The message he wants to declare is what he calls "the mystery of Christ." This suggests that there is something hidden about it. I often refer to the message of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, as "the mystery of humanity" because it is what man everywhere is seeking. Humanity has lost the secret which makes life exciting, vital, and worth living.

This secret, says Paul, is Christ. He is the One who turns life on. This all too often has become the central element in the declaration of the gospel. Far, far too often we Christians have made the gospel sound like only a pattern for going to heaven when we die. It does embody that element, but that is not the heart of it. The heart of it is that not only is Jesus Christ in heaven, but the really great news is that he will make himself available to you right now! His life will come and dwell in you, and you can know him and can have his life available to you -- right now!

This is the great mystery, and this is what excites people. Yet I am constantly amazed, as I travel around the world, to see how few churches are declaring this good news. People can attend church all their lives and never know this great secret. But it is as Paul describes it in this very letter: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" {Colossians 3:3 RSV}. It is the only hope you will ever have of experiencing the glory that God intended for man.

This hope, Paul says, is an offense to people, sometimes. "Because of it," he says, "I am in prison." It is no particular offense to tell people, "Try to do the best you can. Be good, and someday God will let you go to heaven." That is ordinary religiosity. But when you come along and tell them, "God himself has promised to give you life by means of doing what is right," many people don't want to accept it, because it cancels out all our

it on God's behalf. They resent that, and it was for this reason that Paul was in prison -- because of the people that the cross of Christ sets the natural man aside.

Paul concludes his prayer request with these words: "... that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak, I never got away from that sense of owing men something. As he looked at the broken, fragmented humanity, as he saw people's heartache and sorrow, their injustice and cruelty and maliciousness toward each other, and as he sensed the hunger and the longing of their hearts, it awakened in him a deep sense of obligation: "I know how the hunger of their hearts and the longing of their souls can be met, and I want to tell them to, tell them." And so he asks these others to join him in the great ministry of opening the door of the gospel to a needy world by praying that his declaration might be clear and forthright.

Will you make it your ministry in the days ahead to pray for each other, that we all may be ministers of Christ?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for this good news, which has lost not one bit of its power nor its appeal to the human heart. Thank you for Jesus Christ, who has come to set us free, who died for us that he might live in us. Lord, we pray that we may be living examples of his life at work, changing us, redeeming us, correcting us, forgiving us, healing us, meeting all our needs. We give thanks for this glorious message you have given us to declare, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Title: A Word to the Wise
Series: The Battle of Life
Scripture: Col 4:2-4
Message No: 9
Catalog No: 529
Date: March 21, 1971

THE FORCES WE FACE

by Ray C. Stedman

This passage introduces to us a subject which is so often treated as unworthy of any intelligent consideration that I feel it necessary to remind us, at the beginning of this series, that the whole Scripture has been given to us in order to enable us to face life in a realistic, practical manner. To put it another way, God is not interested in religion, but he is tremendously interested in life. You cannot read the New Testament without realizing that the Lord Jesus did not care a whit for the Sabbath regulations of his day when they were set against a broken man for healing. In that, he revealed the heart of God, for certainly God is not interested in glass windows, organ solos, congregational hymns, or even pastoral prayers half so much as he is in producing love-filled homes, generous hearts, and brave men and women who can live right in the world and keep their heads and hearts undefiled.

I am deeply convinced that we can only understand life when we see it as the Bible sees it. That is why the Word of God was given. In the world of organized human society, with its commerce, trade, business, recreation and all the familiar makeup of life, we are continually exposed to illusions which are indistinguishably mingled with reality. We are confronted with the distorted perspectives, twisted certainties, uncertain hopes, and untested programs. But when we come to the Bible we learn the truth. Here is the world as it really is. When we get down to the bare essentials of life, and strip off the confusing illusion, we find it is exactly what the Bible records it to be. Here is where our perspectives are straightened, here is where we get our value systems righted, and our dreams weighed and evaluated to see if they are real or only make-believe.

We may not like what we read here from time to time -- it is very likely that we will not -- but so worse for us. We shall only succeed in deceiving ourselves if we reject it. It is up to us to listen to the word of Jesus and his apostles, for they are the authority which corrects us, not we the authority that corrects them. Let us stop this really silly business of trying to sit in judgment upon the insights of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians must continually reduce every argument we hear today to this simple consideration: "Am I hearing this person's word, or the word of Christ? If this agrees with what he says, fine, it is truth. But if it does not, then I must decide whether the challenging authority is greater or less than Jesus Christ." As Christians we are continually confronted with choices as to whether we will accept the puny, flimsy, uncertain authority of a mere man, or the certain, solid and clear word of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this passage the Apostle Paul is setting forth his analysis of life, especially as it relates to a Christian. This passage is so important that I propose we spend several Sundays together considering it. But too much time to like to look at it only from a general, introductory viewpoint, and see what the apostle brings out about the nature of life in general, and then take a closer look at the specific character which he says a Christian must assume.

Let us read Verses 10-13:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers,

which he implies that all days are not evil. There will come times which are worse than others. There are seasons in the passing of life when pressures are more intense, when problems are more insoluble, when everything seems to come upon us at once. These are what we recognize as evil days. Sometimes it is a day, sometimes it is a week, sometimes months. But thank God that all of life is not that way. We are always under pressure, we are not always being confronted with overpowering circumstances which require agonizing decisions.

The reason we are not is due to the grace of God. All of life would be an evil day, and much worse, if it were not for the grace of God which continually operates to restrain the powers that are against us and to

intelligence because they know these things do not exist.

Though Halloween represents that distorted idea, I am not speaking about the way it is today. It is nothing more than a child's party, a time of enjoyment for children. All children like to be scared and there is nothing wrong in that. I am not taking issue with Halloween as we know it, but I am saying that when people took it seriously (and in places they still do) it represented a distorted view of the devil the apostle has revealed. Because it has suffered this distortion it is usually rejected by those who take life seriously about life. The difficulty is that not only is the distortion rejected but the very truth behind it is also rejected.

I am very well aware of the disdain, even contempt, with which this concept of the devil and his kingdom of darkness, these principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places, is received in our circles. There are those who say, "Are you going to insult our intelligence by talking about a personal devil? Surely you are not going back to those medieval concepts and drag out a devil, and tell us he is the cause of our problems?" Recently I spent an evening in Berlin discussing with four or five intelligent churchmen the whole problem. They were men who knew the Bible intimately. Though we never once opened a Bible, I spent the whole evening together discussing various passages from the Bible. I never referred to a specific passage, but what they were aware of it and could quote it almost verbatim. Yet they rejected the concept of the devil. They said there was no personal devil. They could not believe this. At the end of the evening I admitted that, in their rejection of the devil, they also had no answer to the conundrums which life continually presenting them. We had to leave it there.

I am reminded of the story Billy Graham tells when he hears this idea that there is no devil. It is a boxer who was engaged in a boxing match and was being badly beaten. Battered and bruised, he threw up the ropes and said to his trainer, "Please throw in the towel! This guy is killing me!" The trainer said, "He's not. He's not even hitting you. He hasn't laid a glove on you!" And the boxer said, "Well then, you'd watch that referee -- somebody is sure hitting me!"

The questions we must ask when we are challenged with this idea that there is no devil are, "How do you explain what is going on in the world? How do you explain what is happening? How do you explain the existence of entrenched evil in human affairs?"

Isn't it clear that we cannot understand life unless we begin here? We cannot understand history unless we accept this proposition that the apostle brings out -- that behind the problems of the world, behind the evil that manifests itself in mankind, there is a hierarchy of evil spirits -- the devil and his angels. There is a kingdom of principalities and powers at various levels of authority who sit as world rulers of the kingdom of darkness, wicked spirits in high places.

The world says to the Christian, "Why talk about this kind of thing? Why do you not talk about something that is relevant? Why don't you Christians get busy and do something that will be meaningful today?"

They talk about being relevant! What could be more relevant than this teaching which puts its finger on the basic problem? What good is it to keep rushing around curing fevers, but never stopping to analyze the disease? This is what is going on in our day. There is a serious disease at work in the human race, constantly breaking out in little fevers. But if we content ourselves, as physicians, with running from place to place giving aspirin for the fever, and never once inquiring what the disease is, and what the remedy is, we have wasted our time. Talk about relevancy! This is what is relevant -- to listen to the diagnosis of what is wrong with the world, what its disease is, and what the cure is. That is what this passage does and so accurately sets before us.

The fact is that the disease is growing so desperate that even worldlings, non-Christians, are recognizing the inadequacy of their diagnosis. Listen to Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist.

We stand perplexed and stupefied before the phenomena of Marxism and Bolshevism because we know nothing about man or, at any rate, have only a lopsided and distorted picture of him. If we had self-knowledge, that would not be the case. We stand face to face with the terrible question of evil and do not even know what it is before us, let alone what to do against it. And even if we did know, we still could not understand how it could

happen here.

What a tremendously honest revelation of the ignorance of men in the face of life as it really is! Li

We are to take this seriously and to learn what life is all about. We must learn to recognize how the systems work, and how they appear in life and where they are going.

More than that, we must learn the processes of overcoming them -- not by flesh and blood, not by committees or mustering some kind of physical struggle against these forces. Paul says the weapons of warfare are not carnal, not fleshly, they are not of the body. Our weapons are mighty, through God pulling down of strongholds and bringing into captivity every thought -- there is the arena: it is the thought; it is the realm of ideas -- bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ in victory!

Do you think that is not challenging? That is the greatest challenge any ear can ever hear! Do you think that is not demanding? That demands more courage and manhood than any other cause which has ever been in the world! Do you think that is not exciting? That is the most exciting call which has ever gone out anywhere!

"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might!"

Prayer

Our gracious Father, thank you for a truth that shatters us, startles us, wakens us, produces in us, disturbs us. Thank you Lord, for a word of reality which speaks to us in the midst of our complacency and lethargy and stirs us up to see life as it really is. How easily we would drift on in futile weakness, never raising a finger against the deterioration of life and the destruction of body and soul, were it not for this word of challenge which calls us back, wakes us up, and makes us to see. Lord, teach us how to bow in humility before this word and say to the Holy Spirit, "O Great Teacher of God, open these Scriptures, teach them to make them real." In Christ's name, Amen.

Title: The Forces we Face
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Spiritual Warfare
Scripture: Ephesians 6:10
Message No: 1
Catalog No: 98
Date: October 31, 1965

BEGINNING THE BATTLE

by Ray C. Stedman

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. {Eph 6:10-13 RSV}

In our introductory message we saw that this passage is the answer of Scripture to the cry of people who, in utter bafflement and bewilderment, are asking questions such as this: "Why can we not solve the problems of human life? Why can we not understand ourselves? Why is it that we are so ultimately and powerless in the matter of changing human nature? Why is it that each generation has to fight the battles fought by the previous ones?" Paul's answer to these questions is to go behind the mere visible antagonists, visible to the world and reported in our newspapers, to what he calls "the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places."

kingdom of evil.

In the last message we looked briefly at some of the reactions to this view of life. We saw there are many who are ready to reject this, who refuse to believe in any unseen powers, whether good or bad. They reject the whole idea of any kind of spiritual kingdom at all and say there is neither God nor devil. Of course anyone who wishes to do so is free to make that decision, but when they do they reject the testimony of the Bible as an authority in these areas, and the testimony of millions of Christians through the centuries, and the intelligent and thoughtful conclusions of many men who are not Christians, all of whom recognize the existence of a spiritual kingdom such as this. Anyone who chooses to take that purely voluntary position so as a matter of his will, for there is no evidence that would support him in this. He must ultimately face the fact that he has no answer to the problems and conundrums of life. He has nothing with which to answer the questions which constantly come before man in his daily living.

To pin our hope only on man himself is to be continually disappointed in this constant struggle of man to improve himself. This is why those who subscribe to such a position ultimately assume a spirit of pessimism as they look out upon life. You can see this reflected in many of their writings. H. G. Wells, in the last decade or so was an outstanding proponent of this theory that man was able to improve himself. He sank deeper and deeper into a morass of pessimism as he watched the world scene until his last days, just before his death, revealed his utter despair.

Winds At The End Of Its Tether

Then we saw that there are others who believe in a kingdom of good, i.e., they believe in God and angels, but they refuse to accept this proposition of the existence of the devil. They say they can believe in the existence of God and of heaven and the things that make for good, but they utterly reject the idea of the existence of the devil. This is a completely irrational position. Anyone who subscribes to that position has no logical basis for it, so, for the same revelation which tells us about God tells us about the devil. The same authorities (and his apostles) who speak clearly about God, speak as clearly about the existence of the devil. Even the language that we employ to describe the kingdom of God and its makeup reveals the existence also of the kingdom of evil. Why do we say, for instance, "the Holy Spirit?" We are thereby recognizing there are unholy spirits as well. We cannot make that distinction unless we recognize the existence of unholy spirits. Such a position really reveals a desire to throw out of the Bible that which does not appeal. If we go through our Bibles that way, throwing out everything we do not like, we finally come down to a residue that is left, and we have simply what we happen to prefer. On the basis of that approach to the Scriptures, the only authority is myself, what I think is right, what I choose to accept. Revelation is narrowed down to a tiny, circular area which we personally, for some reason or another (mostly emotional) choose to accept. And thus, of course, we are no longer discussing the question of whether or not there is a devil. We are discussing the authority of the Scriptures. We have moved over to a quite different proposition.

Now I say all this because I realize there are many who are ready to reject this teaching without even an intelligent consideration. Our whole approach to this will find value only as men and women take up the presentation of Scripture in this respect. No other explanation comes to grips with the problem of evil that this one does. No other explanation of the evil of the world takes in all the aspects of human life. I hesitate to make a statement as strong as that. Anything else is superficial, if not artificial. Anything that is shallow and inadequate, if it is not inherently wrong and unreal.

In looking at this passage, therefore, we must expect to learn much about this kingdom of evil, the evil spirits in high places whom Paul says lie behind this insoluble problem of human evil. Notice that this implies that the only ones who can successfully battle against these dark forces are Christians. "For we are contending against flesh and blood..." Who are the "we"? Surely this is not man in general, but the Christians who are indicated in the word "we." It is we Christians who are not contending against flesh and blood. The world struggles on this level, but the Christian wrestles against principalities and powers. This is not a position that is peculiar to Paul. This is a consistent teaching all through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible indicates that all men are victims of these invisible forces. All men everywhere, without exception, are victims; but only believers can be victors.

Jesus himself makes this point absolutely clear. There is a story in Luke 11 of our Lord's reaction to a challenge that was presented to him as he was casting out demons. This activity of our Lord is an

ministry which is continually questioned by those who choose to approach the Scriptures intellectually do not like this business of casting out demons, and explain it in various ways. We will say more about this later on in this series, but in the biblical account certain ones said of him that his casting out demons was from his relationship with Beelzebub, the prince of demons, another name for Satan. They said it was by Satan's power, by Beelzebub's power, that he was casting out demons. (Beelzebub, by the way, means "lord of the garbage." The Jews regarded hell as a cosmic garbage dump, and in a real sense they were right. Hell is exactly what hell is -- a wasted life, a garbage dump.) The god who reigned over this garbage h

How many there are throughout the Christian centuries, and also here this morning, who can testify? Not only the prostitutes and alcoholics and dope addicts, not only those who have been gripped by the power of evil habits, but also those who are held by the power of evil attitudes -- temper, lust, self-righteousness, bitterness, and pride. The strongest chains are not those around the body, but around the mind. Scripture makes that clear. They say, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of them who believe not, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" {cf, 2 Cor 4:4}. That great document on human liberty, the Epistle to the Romans, opens on that note, "Forasmuch as we know that God has revealed himself to the Gentiles, yet they did not glorify him as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the immortal God for images made like to mortal man, as to men, or to beasts, or to creeping things, or to birds of the air. For they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the immortal God for images made like to mortal man, as to men, or to beasts, or to creeping things, or to birds of the air. For they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the immortal God for images made like to mortal man, as to men, or to beasts, or to creeping things, or to birds of the air." {cf, Rom 1:22}, and changed the glory of God into a lie. The mind becomes blinded and the result is darkened minds, which are outwardly intelligent and respectable, but are blinded in these areas which touch the deep-seated problems of human life.

Now the gospel is that Jesus Christ has come to set men free. John says Jesus came into the world "to destroy the works of the devil," {cf, 1 Jn 3:8}. There is no adequate explanation of his coming, apart from the fact that he says he came "to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of his love." Paul says he was chosen as apostle to the Gentiles and, in that dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus, he said to the Lord whom he saw in the glory, "What will you have me to do?" {cf, Acts 9:6}. Jesus replied, "Stand upon your feet, for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan unto God," {cf, Acts 26:16-18}.

This is what the gospel is for; it has no other purpose. If we try to channel it first into smaller areas, such as applying it to social concerns, we only reveal how far we have mistaken its purpose. The gospel may ultimately find its way there, certainly, but it must make its first impact upon this basic problem of human life. Mankind is in the grips of a power which it is helpless to do anything about. The only one who can deliver us from it is Jesus Christ. He has already done so in the mystery of his cross and through the power of his resurrection. When a man or woman believes that, and commits himself upon that basis, he delivers himself from the whole thing becomes practical and actual in his experience. This is what we call conversion. This is the beginning of the battle.

Do you Christians ever think of yourselves this way? You say, "My sins have been forgiven," but do not go on to say, "I have been delivered from the power of darkness, brought out of the power of Satan into the kingdom of God." Do you ever think of yourself that way? Or are we like those Peter mentions? -- "I am forgotten that they were once delivered from their sins," {cf, 2 Pet 1:9}.

Our Lord reveals one other principle in this passage in Luke, Verse 23:

join the church. I'm willing to give my name to this, to join the Christian crowd, and to do all the things that Jesus says you can do, but inwardly I still believe in directing my own life and running my own affairs." Jesus says you can do that, either. "He who does not gather with me scatters." There is one thing which will reveal whether you are with him or against him, and that is the influence of your life.

What is it?

Jesus Christ has come into the world to gather together the children of God. His force, his influence in the world, is a gathering influence, breaking down divisions, binding hearts together, reuniting families, bringing people to live together in harmony, breaking down the barriers of race, healing wounds, bringing nations together. But there is also a force which scatters, which divides.

What is it?

It is self-centeredness. This is the most divisive force known in human life. When men come together, the one thing that splits them up into smaller groups is their vested concern in their own affairs. They are self-centered.

Therefore the great question of life is: What is basically the character of your life? Is it self-centeredness or is it self-givingness? Are you with him or against him? Are you gathering with him in a healing, wholehearted ministry or, when you join a group, a family, an organization, a company, or a nation, are you a divisive factor? Do you split people up? Do you make them quarrel with one another, come to odds with one another?

What about your own family? You say you are a Christian. All right. Are your children drawn closer to the faith because of you? Or are they breaking away from it because of you?

Our Lord here cuts right to the core of life. Man's life is absolutely laid bare and is judged finally on the basis of its relationship to him. The evidence of that relationship is the influence that we exercise.

I am going to leave it there.

The question each must ask himself is, "Am I a victor, or a victim?"

We are helpless to do anything about this ourselves. Nothing we can do in ourselves can change this. Man is not free. He is not able to carry out his own decisions except in a limited area, and it is this limited freedom which makes him imagine that he is a free, unrestrained individual. According to the Bible, man is under the unbroken, absolute control of an evil force which, quite apart from his knowledge, is controlling his thoughts and his reactions. We are absolutely helpless to do anything about this until that power is broken by the acceptance of the One who has come to destroy the works of the devil.

That is what communion is all about. To eat the bread and to drink the wine, which are symbols of the body and the blood of Jesus Christ, and not to be delivered by the Son of God is to perform a blasphemous act. If Christ has set you free, then to partake of communion is a heartwarming experience. It is to receive that deliverance which has come and has broken the chains of Satan, destroyed the binding power of the darkness and let in the light, thus making it possible for us to be men and women as God intended us to be.

If you have not known that deliverance you can know it now. Perhaps you have had to say, "If what the Lord has said be true, then I am still an unbeliever. I am still under the power of Satan." Then the gospel comes to you now, and this is its message:

- In one moment of time you can pass from death into life.
- In one moment of commitment, trusting Christ and his work, no longer reckoning upon any other power, when you are trying to do to make you good enough, you can say, "Lord, here am I. Save me."

You pass in that moment from death into life. That is what conversion is. In the quietness of this moment there may be many who will want to make that decision, who will say, "Lord, if this be true, if this is the way to life, I will follow you."

why human life can never progress beyond what it has in these centuries of struggle and darkness longer want to be a part of that. I want to pass from death into life. Lord Jesus, save me."

In those words you will open the door which permits him to do his saving work.

Prayer

Our Father, we pray that many who have been seeking for answers will, in this present moment, pass from darkness into light, from the power of Satan into the kingdom of God, and be delivered, set free. For us, Lord, who have already experienced this, and know something of the reality of this delivering power in our life, we pray that we may come to Table with deeply grateful hearts. We ask that we may never forget that we have been set that Jesus did this for us when we could do nothing for ourselves. May we celebrate this of love with a heart filled with love for him who loved us and gave himself for us. We pray his name, Amen.

Title: Beginning the Battle
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Spiritual Warfare
Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-13
Message No: 2
Catalog No: 99
Date: November 7, 1965

THE STRATEGY OF SATAN

family fights and church struggles. It is even visible in nature, where all of life competes in a ruthless struggle to survive.

We saw that the whole race, according to this passage, has fallen under the control of satanic forces. Paul calls, "the world rulers of this present darkness" -- a most significant phrase. Jesus confirms the figurative description of Satan as the strong man who, armed, rules his own palace and keeps his peace. The picture of the Bible from beginning to end is that all human beings, without exception, of how clever or educated or cultured they may be, if without Christ, are the helpless victims of satanic control. Under the control of satanic forces human beings are uncomfortable and unhappy, but also unable to escape by any wisdom or power of their own.

But the good news is that some have been set free, some have been delivered. Through the coming of the "stronger one," Jesus himself, who came, as John tells us, "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8), deliverance is obtained. Through the amazing mystery of the cross and the resurrection, Jesus has broken the power and bondage of Satan over human lives. Those who individually receive and acknowledge the gospel (and those who believe, for Scripture always addresses itself to belief), are set free to live in the freedom of the children of God.

But they are not set free to live unto themselves. That is a common misconception of Christianity. Many people believe that Christ has come into their lives by means of the cross, and the things which have bound and blasted them and ruined them have been stricken away, and they have been set free. All too frequently they have been set free to do as they please, to live as they want to live. But they are set free in order to live for God. That is the call which comes to all Christians. We are not set free in order to enjoy ourselves. We are set free to do battle, to engage in the fight, to overcome in our own lives, and to become the channels by which God's love flows. Thus there comes this call to us in this closing chapter in the letter to the Ephesians:

His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

The record confirms that.

Read the Old Testament and you will see that every saint, every prophet, every patriarch, every on

activity is in this realm of the invisible reality of life, the heavenly places where God works, as well as the realm of the devil.

In the Bible, we are told very little of the origin of the devil and his angels, these principalities and powers. There is enough to suggest that here was a being created originally as an angel of might and strength, beauty and power. There is a brief reference to the fall of this great angel, whose name was Lucifer. He was lifted up by pride. Pride is always the mark of the devil. Lifted up by pride, he chose to rival God. In doing so, he fell from his station of might and glory and beauty and became the devil. He drew a host of angels with him, and these constitute the principalities and powers, the organized kingdom of darkness, opposed to the kingdom of God. It is through these hosts of wicked spirits that Satan is able to

the demon within of the character and identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ approached demons, many times they would call out and say, "What have we to do with you, thou Son of God?" (Matthew 8:29, Luke 8:28). They called him by name and used titles for him which the victims they were possessed by were not at all acquainted with. There is so often this immediate and strange recognition of the authority of Jesus Christ. Further, there is always the presence of a totally distinct and different personality in some cases many personalities were involved, as in the incident when Jesus asked the name of the demons and the reply was, "Our name is legion. There are many of us here," (Mark 5:9). Finally, there is the unique part of Christ to transfer demons from an individual to animals. How do you explain the case of the Gadarene swine? If demon possession is merely mental sickness, if it is only hallucination, if it is a symptom of schizophrenia, then how do you explain these demons leaving the man and entering the swine, to rush down the hillside and drown themselves in the sea? These cases simply do not conform to the pattern of known mental disease.

A third factor is that Jesus himself invariably described these cases as demon possession. This is how they were, and he treated them that way. He dealt with this kind of thing continuously. He sent out his disciples and gave them authority to cast out demons. "Well," someone says, "we have an explanation. It is simply a recognition that Jesus was accommodating himself to the thought of the men of his time. They believed in demons and devils and he is simply speaking their language." But it is impossible to take that position and be consistent with the rest of the account of Christ's ministry, for we see him constantly correcting misconceptions like that. On one occasion he said to his disciples, concerning another man, "I would have told you, but you were not so I would have told you," (John 14:2). He came to reveal the truth about things, and in the process he was constantly correcting the misconceptions they held.

Finally, as a last suggestion along this line, throughout the Christian centuries there have been various outbreaks of demon possession described by missionaries in many lands. It is significant that where Christian teaching spreads, the direct assault of these evil powers upon human life is kept in abeyance.

there is far too much concern along these lines.

By far, the majority of the attacks of the devil against Christians are not direct but indirect. That is called the "wiles" of the devil. Wiles means deviousness, circuitry, something not obvious. A direct attack of the devil upon a human life is an obvious thing, but this is something devious, something circuitous, something difficult to detect.

This is what we shall concern ourselves with in our next message. We need to examine this more closely for the major attack of the devil and his powers against human life is not by direct means but indirect, through satanic suggestions through the natural, commonplace channels of life.

This indirect approach comes largely through two media, or channels. One is what the Bible calls "the world" and the other, "the flesh." We often hear the idea, "The enemies of the Christian are the world, the flesh, and the devil," as though these were three equally powerful enemies. But there are not three. There is only one enemy, the devil, as Paul brings out here. But the channels of his indirect approach to men are the world and the flesh. If you would like to see these in Scripture in one passage, I suggest you study Ephesians 2:1-3. Writing to Christians, the apostle says,

And you he [i.e., Christ, the "stronger one," who comes to set us free] when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world [there is the first channel, the world, following the prince of the power of the air, there is a description of the devil] spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. {Eph 2:1-2 RSV}

He says, "Do not forget, you Christians, that you too once were following the course of this world under the grip and in the control of the prince of the power of the air, the evil spirit which is now at work in the children of disobedience." Further, he says,

Among these we all once lived in the passions of our [there is the flesh] following the desires of body and mind [there is the flesh], you say, "we were not aware of any control of the devil." No, of course not. You did what you felt like doing, the natural desires of the body and the mind. You responded to these so-called "natural" desires because we were doing these things, following the course of this world under the direction of the prince of power of the air, and obeying the impulses of the body and the mind, the nature of the children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. {Eph 2:3 RSV}

Do you see how consistently the Bible presents this picture? Now the most basic of these two channels of approach to subverting the Christian life is "the flesh." I would like to say a word about it now.

When the Bible speaks about "the flesh," of course, it uses it in a symbolic sense. Many of us approaching middle age are troubled with too much flesh. But that is not the sense in which the Bible uses the term "the flesh," in this sense, is symbolic. It is not our bodies, not the meat and blood and bones of our physical nature. It is a term which describes the urge to self centeredness within us, that distortion of human nature which we want to be our own god, that proud ego, that uncrucified self which is the seat of willful defiance and rebellion against authority.

You recognize that we are all born with this. None of us had to go to school to learn how to do this. Who taught us to lie? Who taught us to be proud, and bitter, and rebellious, and defiant, and self centered? We never had to take classes in these, did we? We were all experts in them by the time we were ready for school. We were all born with "the flesh," and it is the presence of this which makes us sinners. This is the wisdom which is from beneath, which is "earthly, sensual, devilish," {Jas 3:15 KJV}. Devils are the devil, attacking indirectly, through the essential character of human nature, distorting it and twisting it, changing it from what God designed it to be. You can see the satanic origin of this in the fact that the distortion of the beauty which God intended man to have. Romans 3:23 says, as Phillips translates, "Everyone has sinned and has missed the beauty of God's plan."

By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Spiritual Warfare
Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-13
Message No: 3
Catalog No: 100
Date: November 14, 1965

THE TACTICS OF TERROR

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series we are coming away from a very troubled, confused and despairing world to consideration of the only adequate explanation for the human dilemma ever offered. That explanation is given very briefly in the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 6:10-13:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. {Eph 6:10-13 RSV}

If this diagnosis is true, then it is the height of insanity to attempt to correct the world's problem by dealing with this evil power which is behind them, these principalities and powers that Paul speaks of when he calls, "the world rulers of this present darkness."

You can see immediately how universal this is. Is there anyone who has never had this problem? Certainly not. This is the main battlefield where we fight against these world rulers of present darkness. This is not remote from us, nor something which occasionally comes to a certain few Christians. This is a battle in which we are all engaged, every moment of our lives. We will never conquer in it unless we understand it not as something reserved for Sundays, but something in which we are involved Mondays through Saturdays as well.

The flesh, this inner arena of battle, accompanies us everywhere we go. We cannot escape it, we cannot get away from it, we cannot go back to mother, and leave it behind. Therefore, we must begin our battle at this point.

But someone says, "I thought that when one became a Christian, Christ set you free from the kingdom of Satan. The devil can no longer touch you."

Is that your concept of the Christian life? Nothing could be more shallow, incomplete, and wrong! When you become a Christian the battle only begins. That is when it starts well.

us for life. We shall never escape it until that wonderful day of the resurrection from the dead. The dead because of sin, and we live with it, therefore, for life.

But the body, soul and spirit of man are inextricably tied together. No one can understand this. Where does your soul live in your body? Do you know? No, but you know that you have a soul, though no one can see it in the body. The relationship between the body, soul and spirit is beyond our comprehension. Because they are so inextricably tied together, the flesh, linked to the body, touches the whole man. It is impossible to see this. This means that the devil can influence us, in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit. He influences the whole man through the channel of the flesh.

Put another way, we are subject to the influence of these world rulers of present darkness through our feelings, and our deeds, through our intelligence, our emotions, and our will -- that which we think or say -- which, of course, is another way of describing our deeds.

We need to understand how this works:

Through the channel of the mind, the intelligence, the devil makes his appeal to human pride. We regard reason as the greatest gift God has given to man -- and not without justification. Obviously it is our ability to reason, to bold abstract concepts and relate them one to another, which makes us superior to the rest of the lower creation. We take pride in this ability to reason. It is through our pride that the devil influences us along the channel of the mind.

Through the emotions, he works on our fears. Emotion is really our most human characteristic. It is not that we are basically rationally-governed beings. We like to think it is through our logic and reason that we govern ourselves, but it can easily be demonstrated that this is not true. We are really governed by our emotions, our urges, our desires, our deep-seated, sometimes subconscious wants -- our instincts. It is through these that the devil makes his appeal to us by playing on our fears. We are so afraid of death or hurt or pain or out on life in some way, or will be hurt by some sacrifice for God's sake.

In the realm of deeds, or practical matters, the devil makes his appeal to pleasure, for the body is sensual, i.e., it is designed by God to respond to stimuli. We learn early in life that there are certain pleasures which are very pleasurable, while others are unpleasant. We learn to seek the pleasant and reject the unpleasant. So the body is constantly seeking after that which thrills or excites or pleases in some way, turning away from that which hurts or injures or causes some degree of unpleasant reaction. Thus the devil makes his appeal through the realm of our deeds.

See how accurately this is illustrated by the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden. We are told that the fruit was good for food, i.e., it offered the pleasant sensation of eating (the appeal to the senses), that the fruit was a delight to the eyes, i.e., it awakened within her a sense of beauty (the appeal to the emotions), that she saw that it was desired to make one wise (there is the appeal to the pride of mind, the appeal to the intelligence and love of wisdom), she took and ate. These are simply the channels by which men are influenced, whether by God or the devil does not make any difference. This is the way men are.

This is the amazing thing about the Bible and the great proof that it is more than a human book. It is a book which understands man. It helps us to understand the way we are, and when we apply it to our lives, we find that it is exactly right, that it describes exactly the way we operate. It is important to notice that these forces outside man, which work upon man -- God and the devil -- move him through these channels.

which they move.

Here is the greatness of the gospel. Here the gospel is seen in its appeal to the whole man, to the whole of life. That is why it is so obviously divinely given. It does not speak to a part of life only, but it speaks to the whole of life. The gospel touches and explains all of history. It is a world view. It takes in every aspect of the problems of man and of history. It provides a framework for every science, every endeavor to invent, every advent of history. The gospel is not content simply to adjust a few problems in man. That is not always coming to Christ for. We want him to solve this immediate difficult situation in which we find ourselves. But he never stops there. He knows us, and he knows that if he solves this small problem there, he has touched only a part of our life, and the rest will remain out of balance and eccentric. So the gospel makes its appeal to the whole of man. It touches every part of his life.

You can see this in the life of our Lord. Read the Gospel records and see what a marvelous balance and poise the Lord Jesus, what perfect poise he exhibits in every circumstance. He says things which absolutely challenge the greatest thinkers of his time, and they listen with astonishment to what he says and to what he exhibits. They say, "Never man spake like this man," {John 7:46 KJV}. But he is not all intellect, his appeal to the philosopher alone. As you read the record you see that he is also warmly human, constantly expressing compassion and human concern. He is easy to live with. Further, he manifests intelligence and emotionalism in deeds. He is not content merely to feel certain things or to talk about great truths, but these find their ultimate expression in practical deeds, in actions, in unforgettable events such as the cross and the resurrection. His life is thus grounded in history. That is the ground of our faith.

You can see this appeal to the whole of man in the Scriptures. What a marvelous sanity of balance and poise maintained in the Bible! The whole man is ministered to -- the needs of the soul, the body, and the emotions, kept in a delicate equilibrium, with nothing out of balance. Everything is in harmony -- the mind, the emotions, the will are all moved together. When God gets hold of a man he takes the whole man and begins to minister to every part of his life. That is the gospel. Anything less is an incomplete message, a fragment of the truth.

I am indebted to Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones for pointing out that this is beautifully expressed in one of our familiar hymns of Isaac Watts, "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross"

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,

Love does what? Demands! There is the will being impelled to action.

the "Ground of our Being." "Ah," he says, "if you really want to be an intelligent man, if you want to understand what this whole business of Christianity has been driving at all along, then move on to the concept of God -- he is the Ground of our Being!" The whole book develops this theme as a revolutionary advance in theological thinking.

The fact is, this is the most primitive knowledge about God possible. Turn to the story of the Apostle Paul's journey to the center of intellectualism of his day -- the city of Athens -- and read his great address to the Athenians on Mars Hill. As he walked around the city he found it saturated in superstition. He found everywhere a superstitious, ignorant, pagan faith everywhere he went -- even finding an altar that was inscribed 'Unknown God.' He said to them, "It is the God whom you ignorantly worship that I have come to tell you," {cf, Acts 17:23}. He started on that level.

He said, "Look, you know yourselves that God does not dwell in temples made of stones -- not the things that have made the heavens and the earth and all things that are in them. Your own poets have recognized that God is not far from anyone of us, for 'in him we live and move and have our being,'" {cf, Acts 17:28}. They already knew that much about God. That is the simplest level of faith -- primitive faith, the faith that is the result of an ignorant searching and groping after God. This book shows how cleverly the devil is pushing the mind of man, through an appeal to his pride, out to what he thinks are new advances in knowledge, nothing but the simplest, most primitive understanding of God.

Again, in this realm of the mind, the devil is constantly trying to create doubt. It is here he plants seeds of doubt and incites false teaching. False teaching is always an extreme position, an exaggeration of one particular aspect of truth. You can take all the false teaching that is present in the world today, compare it to the truth, and you will see that it is simply taking some aspect of truth and blowing it up out of proportion. That is always the devil's maneuver, his favorite method of working -- to push to an extreme.

He does it even about himself. He tries to make people believe there is no devil. He works wilily to hide himself. What is most important when you are trying to capture some wild animal? Concealment. You try to hide yourself; you do not want to be seen. This is what the devil does. He persuades people that there is no devil. Then he is perfectly free to do exactly what he wants to do with humanity. But when he wakes up to that and refuses to take that position, then what does he do? Well, he comes and says, "I am the devil, and I am perfectly right!" Of course there is a devil. You know it and I know it. But my power, my cunning, my strength, and my wiliness are so great that you had better give all your time and thought to efforts to overcome me. Thus he pushes over to another extreme which will lead on into superstition, voodooism, and all the rest of it.

down, one day they are on top and the next day, because of their feelings, they are down and the troughs. They live on an emotional teeter-totter. If this describes you then you have succumbed to the wiles of the devil.

This is what the devil wants us to do, this is what keeps us defeated. He gets some exercised about being concerned and showing compassion to the point that they are acutely anxious all the time, filled with a constant fretful complaint. But when they see that is wrong, then the devil blandly seeks to push them over the other side and they become callous and cynical, not caring for anybody. The devil always makes his appeal to our fears, while God makes his appeal to faith. From faith comes hope and love, but the devil leads us to the opposite. He wants us to give way to our fears. The one thing Jesus said over and over again to his disciples was, "Fear not. Be not fearful, be not anxious, be not troubled." Why? Because, "I am with you." He said. From fear comes despair, the opposite of hope, and hate, the opposite of love. That is what the devil wants after. If you give way to fear, you will soon be discouraged and defeated. If you give way to defeat, you will begin to hate, and then the devil will have accomplished his purpose. He has destroyed, he had ruined.

whatever life can throw at us.

Prayer

Teach us, Father, to have the humility to admit we have not been doing a very good job on this score, that we have been deceived, have often been deluded, have been upset and trapped, have been snared time and time again by the wiles of the devil. Lord, grant to us a willingness to listen, to give careful, thoughtful and continued attention to the way of victory provided through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has known all along that we would face this kind of battle and has been trying to tell us but we have been so slow of hearing. Lord, make us attentive to his word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Title: The Tactics of Terror
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Spiritual Warfare
Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-13
Message No: 4
Catalog No: 101
Date: November 21, 1965

DEFENSE AGAINST DEFEAT, Part 1

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series we are trying to understand life, both in the larger scene of the world and the immediate situation in which we find ourselves. We have already seen that it is a struggle. The one we are looking at in Ephesians points out that life is a conflict. And our experience confirms this. We know it, perhaps, but we cannot deny it. When we ask ourselves, "Why is life a struggle?" the Apostle Paul says it is not what we usually imagine to be the problem -- it is not flesh and blood, it is not other people, it is not inclined to blame someone else. But Paul says it is not against flesh and blood, rather, we are struggling against the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, the wicked spirits in heavenly or high places. Phillips translates that last phrase, "spiritual agents from the very headquaters of evil."

On previous messages we tried to see what is meant by the phrase, "the wiles of the devil," how he works in his craftiness, in his williness, trapping us, snaring us with subterfuges and stratagems. My message was very hurried and incomplete. It would take many messages to cover the approaches the devil uses in influencing our lives. But perhaps we saw enough to make us realize something of our weakness and inadequacy, in our own strength and wisdom, to overcome the stratagems of the devil.

Further, we saw that we were under attack from the devil through the channels of the world and the world is human society influenced by satanic philosophies and reflecting satanic ideas. The flesh is a strong compulsion toward self-centeredness which is a heritage of Adam's fall. Because the flesh is intensely personal and inescapably present, we tried to concentrate upon this. We saw that, by means of this, the devil attacks us through the channels of our mind, our emotions, and our activities. These constitute the makeup as men, as human beings. We learned that the devil aims to create imbalance, over-emphasis, eccentricity, inflating some aspect of life to outrageous proportions.

His goal is always to produce discouragement, confusion or indifference. Whenever we find ourselves in a state of confusion and uncertainty, or discouragement and defeat, or an indifferent, callous attitude toward life or others, we have already succumbed to the wiles of the devil. Are you discouraged? Are you uncertain, not knowing what is the truth, what is right, what is the answer? Are you indifferent, uncaring, by living each moment with cynicism, indifferent to what the outcome may be? If so, then you have

become a victim of the wiles of the devil. If these conditions continue, the end inevitably will be boredom, futility, a wasted life, ruin. That is what the devil aims for. Jesus said the devil is a liar and a murderer. His aim is to destroy, to wreck, to distort and pervert human life.

But, as we have already seen, this need not be. The very passage we are studying describes God's defense against the wiles of the devil. We are urged and encouraged to use it. "Be strong in the Lord," the apostle says, "and in the strength of his might," {Eph 6:10 RSV}. It is possible to stand; it is possible to overcome. This word is very encouraging to us. But that alone is not enough. That tells us there is something to be done, but it does not tell us exactly what it is. Our question always is, "How do you do this?" How, exactly, do we become, "strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might?" The answer is, "Put on the whole armor of God," {Eph 6:11a RSV}. That is where we must begin today. Paul says,

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. {Eph 6:14-17 RSV}

You can see this is highly figurative language. These are not entities in themselves, but are symbols of something real. In order to understand them we must look behind the figures to the reality. We have seen the significance of this armor in what I have already pointed out. The armor is the way to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. The armor is nothing more than a symbolic description of the Lord Jesus Christ. The armor is Christ, and what he is prepared to be, and to do, in and to each one of us. When Paul speaks of these various pieces he is speaking of Christ and how we are to regard him, how we are to lay hold of Christ in our defense against the stratagems of the devil. It is not merely Christ available to us, but Christ appropriated.

In Romans 13, Paul clearly declares this concept: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof," {Rom 13:14 KJV}. Also, writing to his son in the faith, the apostle Timothy, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," {cf, 2 Tim 2:1}. That is where our armor lies. Christ is our defense. Therefore, we need to study this armor in order to lay hold of Christ in a practical way. General truth, I have discovered (and I am sure you have too) that the Lord can help us very much.

It is easy to speak in empty generalities about Christian living. Sometimes we pick a phrase out of the Bible and employ it almost as an incantation, some kind of magic defense, going about repeating certain words that is not the way the Bible suggests. That is the way the cults treat the Bible. It is easy for us to say, "Christ is the answer!" Well, yes, Christ is the answer -- but how is he the answer? That is what we need to know, and this is what this armor is. Jesus Christ is the answer as a specific defense against specific things.

Before we look at the armor more precisely, there are two things we need to note which are brought out in the text:

First, there are two general divisions or classifications of the pieces of this armor, indicated by the verbs which are used. The first division, covering the first three pieces, is something we have already done in the past if we are Christians:

- "having girded your loins with truth;"
- "having put on the breastplate of righteousness;"
- "having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace."

These all refer to something already done if we are Christians at all.

- "taking the shield of faith";
- "take the helmet of salvation,
- and the sword of the Spirit."

There are, first, the things we have already put on once and need never put on again. But we must wear them and remind ourselves of what they mean. Second, there are aspects of Christ which we must wear and again whenever we feel under attack.

The second thing to note about this armor is that the order in which these pieces are given to us is very important. Learn to pay careful attention to the order in which Scripture puts things. The order of these items is very, very important. You cannot reverse them or mix them up. The reason many Christians cannot properly to exercise the sword of the Spirit is because they have never first girded up the loins with truth. You cannot do it in reverse order. Scripture is very exact in this, so as we go through, let us note carefully the order.

Now we want to take quickly the first three of these which constitute the first division of this armor.

"Having girded your loins with truth" -- that is always the place to start whenever you are under attack. Whenever you feel discouraged, defeated, uncertain, confused, downcast, depressed, or indifferent, the place to start: "Gird up your loins with truth." The officers in the Roman army wore short skirts, like Scottish kilts. Over them they had a cloak or tunic which was secured at the waist with a girdle. When they were about to enter battle they would tuck the tunic up under the girdle so as to leave their legs unimpeded for the fight. Girding the loins was always a symbol of readiness to fight. That is why you cannot do battle until you first gird up the loins with truth.

When you are threatened by discouragement, coldness, and similar moods, how do you fight back? Remember that, when you became a Christian, you girded up your loins with truth. What does that mean precisely? It means to remind yourself that, in coming to Jesus Christ, you found the truth behind all things. You found him who is in himself the truth, the key to life, the secret of the universe, final reality! This is the truth used in that sense in this very letter. In Chapter 4, Verse 20, the apostle says to these Ephesians:

You did not so learn Christ, ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ uncleanness and licentiousness, ~~assuming~~ ^{assuming} that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. {Eph 4:20-21 RSV}

He is the truth, the reality, the key to life. "In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," {cf, Col 2:3}.

"Well," someone says, "how do you know that? How do you know you are not performing an act of blind faith without any supporting evidence at all? You say you believe in Jesus, but you have accepted his authority without any evidence to support it. That's blind faith." But that is not what a Christian believes. Christian faith is not blind faith. When we believe Christ is the truth, we believe it because he demonstrated that he was the truth. We need to put it on that basis.

How did he demonstrate that he was the truth?

- First, by what he said. Read the things he said. Incomparable things! He gave the clearest insight into what human life was about ever given in the hearing of men. Even his enemies say so. No one saw so clearly as he, no one ever probed so deeply or put his finger so precisely upon the things which make up human life and thinking. In what he said you can see he spoke the truth. "No man spake like this man," {cf, John 7:46}
- But not only that, he demonstrated the truth by what he did. This New Testament record is full of an account of mighty deeds and historic events. Miracles? Yes, there are evidences of the intrusion of the spiritual kingdom -- that invisible realm of reality -- into the visible realm. He capped it all, capped it by showing that he had solved the one problem which is insoluble to every other man -- the problem of death. He rose from the dead! Who else has ever done anything like that? What other person

what other thinker, what other man who has ever challenged men has ever done anything solved that basic problem of life? That is why I know Jesus Christ is the truth, because he solved the problem of death.

This, by the way, is why the enemies of the Scriptures fight so fiercely to destroy the historicity of these events, if they can. They want us to think it does not matter whether these things were historical. Of course they are historically true, and of course it greatly matters, for these events demonstrate the truth.

But it is not only by what he said and what he did, but further, by what he is. Bring this into the present. What has he been to you? What has he been to others? Look back at your own Christian life and its beginning. Has he delivered you? Has he set you free? Has he broken any chains in your life? Has he been your friend? Has he brought you back into balance and harmony? It has been pointed out that through the centuries men have been calling on others for help. You may lack courage and call on a great contemporary hero to help you. Nothing happens. You may lack wisdom and call on one of the great philosophers of the day. Or, lacking eloquence, you may cry, "Shakespeare, help me!" But no help comes. Yet for twenty centuries men and women in desperate plight have been calling out, "Lord Jesus Christ, help me" -- and help is given! Deliverance comes! That is how we know he is the truth.

Remember that all conflicting systems and philosophies must be tested at all points, not just at one point. Some philosophies can do something. Ah, yes, many systems which basically are wrong still can help in a certain area. They can help somewhere, they can accomplish some good. But, my Christian friends, we must know that this is never the mark of truth. Because something does some good is no mark of truth. Truth is a complete entity. Truth is reality, the way things really are. Therefore it is the explanation of all things. You know you have found the truth when you find something which is wide enough and deep enough to encompass all things. That is what Jesus Christ does.

Further, ultimate reality never changes. Here is another mark. Truth never needs updating, never needs to be modernized. If something was true ten thousand years ago, it is still true today. If it is true today, it was true a hundred thousand years ago. Truth does not need updating.

I delight in the story of the man who came to his old friend, a music teacher, and said to him in the language we moderns use, "What's the good news today?" The old man never said a word. He walked across the room, picked up a hammer and struck a tuning fork. As the note sounded out through the room, he said, "That is 'A' today, it is 'A' five thousand years ago, and it will be 'A' ten thousand years from now. If the soprano upstairs sings off-key, the tenor across the hall flatters his high notes, and the piano downstairs plays out of tune." He struck the note again, and said, "That is 'A,' my friend, and that's the good news for today."

That is what Jesus Christ is -- unchanging. He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever," (cf. Hebrews 13:8). That is how you know you have truth. Remember that when you feel defeated, when you are uncertain, when doubts come flooding into your mind. Remember that you have girded up your loins with truth. You have found him who is the solid rock:

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

Now look at the second piece of armor, the breastplate of righteousness. Have you put that on? "Put on the breastplate of righteousness" -- what does that mean? Well, that is Christ as the ground of your righteous standing before God, your acceptance before him. If you have that on you can rest secure. Your heart, your emotions, are securely guarded and adequately protected against attack. This is perhaps the most frequent ground of attack against Christian faith. Christians, by one means or another, through one circumstance or another, often feel they lack assurance. They feel unworthy of God. They feel the failure in the Christian life and that God, therefore, is certain to reject them, that he is no longer interested in them. They are so aware of their failures and shortcomings. Growth has been so slow. The first joy has faded, and they feel God is angry with them or that he is distant, far off somewhere. There is a sense of guilt. Their conscience is always stabbing them, making them unhappy, miserable. They feel

blames them. This is simply a satanic attack, a means of opposing and destroying what God intends.

How do you answer an attack like this? You are to remember that you have put on the breastplate of righteousness. In other words, you do not stand on your own merits. You never did. You never had anything worthwhile in yourself to offer to God. You gave all that up when you came to Christ. You quit trying to be good enough to please God. You came on his merits. You came on the ground of his imputed righteousness that which he gives to you. You began your Christian life like that and there is no change now. You stand on that basis.

This is why Paul begins his great eighth chapter to the Romans with the words, "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," {Rom 8:1 RSV}. No condemnation! You are not condemned when you believe that God is angry with you and that he rejects you. Remember, you stand on Christ. You are "accepted in the Beloved," {Eph 1:6 KJV}. Further on in that chapter he asks, "Who can accuse us?" {Rom 8:33}. It is God who justifies. Christ, who died for us, is the only one who has the right to condemn and he loves us. Therefore there is no separation. "Who can separate us from the love of God in Christ?" {cf, Rom 8:35a}. Who can do this?

What does this mean? Well, again it is Christ, but Christ our peace this time -- our source of calm i.e., a sense of well-being. Notice the relation of one piece to another and the importance of the one stressed earlier. The first piece tells us that Christ is the truth, the ultimate secret of reality. We have come home, we have touched the key to life of Jesus Christ. That is something for the mind to understand and believe. And then what? Well, we know him then. We stand on his merits. We put on the breastplate of his righteousness. We come on the basis of what he has done and not what we do. And what is the result? Our hearts are at peace! Paul says, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through Jesus Christ," {Rom 5:1 KJV}. Calmness, courage! To use a modern term, and, I think, the most accurate, we have good "morale." Our morale is high. We are ready for anything. No ground can be too rough for Christ -- and we have Christ. Therefore we have good morale.

Do you remember the dark days in England when they were going through the blitz, and bombs were falling down all the time? The situation was really desperate. Then Winston Churchill would come on the radio to speak to the English people when their hearts were filled with defeat and discouragement. At times they would be almost ready to quit. But that one man's voice would ring out and the nation would take heart. Their morale would be strong. That is what Christ does. He is able to speak peace to our hearts.

A lady said to me this morning, "Oh, if I could convey to you something of the inner healing, the peace that has come into my heart through a recent experience. Oh, the joy of this thing -- even though it was through agony and anguish!"

This is the place to start. It is not a battle against people at all, is it? It is an inner fight, a battle in the thought life, in the realm of our attitudes. It is a battle in the realm of your outlook upon the world in which you find yourself. This is the place to start. Gird up your loins with truth. Remember that in Christ you have a demonstration which no man can equal anywhere in the world. Here is the key to victory. One who is worth listening to. Believe him, Christian people, believe him!

If you are Christians at all, if you have accepted Christ as the One who has the explanation for life, listen to what he says. Act on it. That is the girdle of truth.

The breastplate of righteousness protects the emotions. You do not need to be discouraged. Of course you have failed -- I fail, we all fail -- but that is what we are here to learn to overcome. The One who understands all this. He knows we are going to fail, and he knows we are going to struggle. He knows it will be an up-and-down experience, and a time of battles -- and we will lose some of them. But he has taken care of all that. You do not have to stand on your merits. You stand on mine. Do not be discouraged, do not be defeated, we will win through. I know what I am doing, I know how to lead you, I know what the circumstances to bring you into and I will bring you through."

The third requisite is to have the feet shod with the preparation, the readiness, of a sense of peace. The first start is to remember who you are, what you are, and above all else, whom you have. Be strong in the Lord and for his sake. Remember you belong to Christ's family. The Scripture says he is not ashamed to be called our God. God is not ashamed to be called our God. Be strong for his sake. Let us get away from subjectiveness all the time -- "What is going to happen to me, and how do I feel?" -- remembering that Christ has vested his honor in us. Learn to talk to yourself and answer back to what you say.

Thus you will discover that if you put on these three things, the battle is almost won right there. It is a little difficulty overcoming evil if you start right there.

Prayer

Our Father, make these words clear, plain, practical, and helpful to us. May they meet us right where we are and help us right in the conflict in which we are engaged. May our hearts be lifted up by the consciousness that the One who is in us is adequate for all things. In Christ's name, Amen.

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By: Ray C. Stedman
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DEFENSE AGAINST DEFEAT, Part 2

by Ray C. Stedman

Discouragement, confusion, indifference -- these are the signs of the devil's working. Discouragement all that means in terms of depression of spirit, the playing over and over again of vain regrets, and outlook on life we call the blues. Confusion, with its doubt and uncertainty, disillusionment, strife and argument. Indifference, with its cynicism, callousness, coldness, and bitterness toward one another toward the things of God. These are the major evidences of the devil's working through the fleshly channel of the inner man. To produce these things, as we have already seen, the devil approaches our circumstances, or feelings, and through the workings of our minds by implanting doubts and

The great question we are facing is, "What do you do as a Christian when these things occur to you? How do you handle these? What do you do in your life to counteract?"

I will tell you what many Christians do -- they complain!

They say, "Oh, the devil's really been after me. What a time I've been having, what a rough time I've been through. Everything is so discouraging and there is simply nothing I can do about it." As one woman

common to man," {cf, 1 Cor 10:13a}.

This is exactly the opposite of the way we frequently feel. We love to think that something most happening to us. "No one has ever gone through what we are going through. No one has had to u depression of spirit that we feel." But Paul says you are so wrong. "No temptation has overtaken as is common to man: but God is faithful, ..." {cf, 1 Cor 10:13a}. So stop complaining about what It is God's will for you. Let us face that. And instead of a fretful, peevis, whining attitude, let us word of God says to do when these things occur. What is that? "Put on the whole armor of God be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," {Eph 6:11 RSV}. There is no other way to handle it

That is the third thing. This is the confirmation of the claim that he is our righteousness. It proves he really did do something, because the experience of it in our life now is that we have a sense of peace not lost in a sea of relativity. We have a solid rock on which to stand, an anchor of unchanging certainty amidst of a constantly changing, variable world. We have a place on which to stand and fight, and the power with which to face every situation. That is what Jesus Christ is to anyone who knows him in peace. That is morale.

A word of warning: Do not try to start with peace. When you get troubled or upset, when attacked, do not try to start with making your heart feel at peace. This is a mistake many people make; they try to get some kind of feeling of peace within and succeed only in upsetting themselves more. Do not start with peace. Start with truth. Christ is the truth. Work your way back down through truth and righteousness and peace will come out at peace. This is the way to begin.

Let us take a closer look at this battle. If we remind ourselves of these great truths, they ought to put us at rest. But every one of us knows that, though they often set our hearts at rest, there are times when they do not. We find ourselves still depressed. We are still filled with doubts, still disturbed. Perhaps there is some reason for us to feel this way. We may even wake up in a blue mood first thing in the morning though we went to bed very happy. There is no good reason for our depression. We do not know why this has happened. There is no explanation we can see. There is nothing wrong physically (and the physical elements of our environment can have a very great bearing on our feelings) but still we feel depressed.

Well, what is happening? We are experiencing what Paul calls here "the flaming darts of the evil one" which are part of the wiles of the devil, the wiles, the stratagems of Satan.

They come to us in various forms. Sometimes they are evil thoughts and imaginations which intrude upon themselves suddenly upon our thinking, oftentimes at the most incongruous times. We may be reading the Bible, we may be bowed in prayer, we may be thinking about something else quite entirely when a sudden some filthy, lewd thought flashes into our mind. What is this? One of the fiery darts of the evil one. We ought to recognize it as such.

Sometimes these come as doubts, and even blasphemies, sudden feelings we experience that perhaps Christianity is nothing after all but a big hoax, some dream which men had. Perhaps we feel that it can be explained psychologically, or that Jesus Christ is really a humbug, a victim of self-delusion. Perhaps we feel that it is not the way we have been taught it is, and things are not the way the Bible says. You have doubtless experienced these times. All Christians have had this sudden feeling that perhaps it is all a fantasy, a mere imagination. Again, these fiery darts may come in the form of sudden fears, anxieties, a fleeting sense that all things are all wrong. We cannot seem to shake it. Though we try to reason ourselves out of it, we cannot.

What are these feelings? Well, whatever form they may take, they are always from the same source, the fiery darts of the wicked one. We are the biggest fools on earth if we do not see them in that light with them as such. And, in whatever form they may come to us, they always have two characteristics.

First, they seem to arise out of our own thoughts. They seem to come right from our inner selves. "This is something I am thinking," and oftentimes it is a shocking thing. But the devil is really whispering to us. He is communicating to us. He is influencing us. Ah yes, but it does not seem like that to us. In our ignorance and innocence we blame ourselves, "How can I think a thing like this if I am a Christian? How can a Christian have such a lewd and filthy thought as this? Can I really be a Christian if I think like this? How can I be one after all." This, of course, is exactly why the devil sent his thought to you, because this is what he wants you to think. If it is a doubt (and we are always exposed to doubts, these sudden attacks upon our faith, these sudden feelings that Christianity is not as sure and certain as it once seemed to us), we say to ourselves, "I must have already lost my faith or I would not think like this. What is the matter with me? How can I be a Christian and even have a thought like this?" So we try to repress the thought. We think, "There must be something wrong; we should not feel like this," and we push the thought down into our subconscious, but we know it is still there, lurking underneath, and we feel dishonest because we are not even trying to deal with it. This thing takes its toll of us in physical ways as well as in mental and emotional strain and suffering. We feel uncertain and confused because we are convinced that the opposite of faith is doubt. We think

doubts we cannot have faith and if we have faith we do not have doubts. Therefore, if we have doubts we must not and cannot be men and women of faith. We do not see this as the lie of the devil. We see it as our own faithless thinking. This is always the first characteristic of these things. They seem to come from ourselves and are identified with us in our thinking.

The second thing is that they are always an attack upon our position in Christ as the truth, our righteousness and our peace. These things are always an insinuation of doubt about those matters -- never about anything else. They are an attack upon those areas of faith. This is always the way of the devil. Read the Bible from beginning to end and you see it all the way through. He said to Eve in the garden, "Has God said that ...?" {cf, Gen 3:1}. There is the implication of doubt. He said to Jesus, in the temple the wilderness, "If thou be the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread," {cf, Matt 4:3, Luke 4:9}. There is always the insinuation that these things are not true. This is the way he raises doubts, creates fear, and arouses fear. These are the "seeds" that lead to the fall of man!

and send them back where they belong!"

Using the shield of faith means refusal to feel condemned or to feel guilty:

"God loves me. He says so. He says nothing will change that. Nothing will separate us. Nothing I do or fail to do will separate us! All right, then I will believe that, and therefore I cannot believe this thought that God does not love me and want me."

You see, you cannot have both. No man can serve two masters.

"Christ is the ground of my peace. Therefore it is his responsibility to take me through everything. He is the adequate One. He has come to carry me through every situation. So I cannot, I will not, believe this fear, this sudden anxiety which grips my heart. I will not believe that it is from me. It is simply sent to shake my confidence in Christ. It is an attempt to destroy my peace. But Christ is adequate for even this and therefore I refuse to change."

This is what James calls "resisting the devil," {Jas 4:7b}. This is the shield of faith. This is refusing to believe the lie that if you have doubts you cannot have faith. Because that is a lie. Doubt is always faith. The fact that you have doubts proves that you have faith. They are not opposites at all. Doubt is of the reality of faith. Therefore re-examine the ground of your faith and reassert it, and remember that doubts are not necessarily at all.

And James says that, if you keep on resisting the devil, "he will flee from you," {Jas 4:7c}. Think of it: he will flee from you. You do it again and again every time the thought comes back. You resist it on to the next day. You refuse to give up your position. And, sooner or later, inevitably, the doubts will clear. Your feet will change, the attacks cease, and you will be back again in the sunshine of faith and the experience of the joy of God.

That is what Paul is talking about: "Take the shield of faith. It is able to quench every fiery dart of the wicked one." The shield of faith is enough in itself. It is all you need. You do not really need the remainder of the armor. The last two pieces of the armor. It may sound strange to say that, but it is true. You do not need anything else. This is able to quench every fiery dart of the wicked one. It alone would see you through, if that were all you had.

Then why are we given more? Because we are not only to be conquerors. The Bible says we are to be more than conquerors," {Rom 8:37}. We are not only to win, we are to win victoriously, triumphantly, and abundantly. Remember that John said, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world," {1 Jn 4:4 KJV}. He adds, "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound," {cf, Rom 5:20}. We are intended to do more than barely make it to heaven. We are designed to triumph, to be fearless, to be not only unconquered but unconquerable!

So there is more here: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit." We will reserve more on examining how fully, adequately, and abundantly -- more than adequately -- this armor is designed to protect us in the midst of a very difficult and changing world. It is thus that we can be "strong in the Lord through the strength of his might," thus, that we can "stand in the evil day."

I think so often of these words of Kipling, describing the pressures of life:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you:
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you.
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream -- and not make dreams your master:
If you can think -- and not make thoughts your aim
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same:

devil, the clever ruses and subtle stratagems by which he

- Weakens our faith,
- Lowers our morals, and
- Neutralizes our witness.

Many have said to me since this series began, "I never realized before that all this had to do with this had been happening to me all along."

A number have said, "I never knew what it really meant to face the wiles of the devil, or what were the darts of the wicked one."

I am glad we have come to understand that this is not at all remote from us, but it is a battle we face every moment of every day. Once we have understood something about the form of attack by which the devil accomplishes his work in mankind, we immediately become interested in discovering how we can resist it, therefore, necessary that we give our attention to what the apostle has to say about the armor of God.

Though the defense of the Christian is couched in figurative language, it is a description of something very real. It is not an automatic procedure which we experience, but an intelligent program we are expected to follow.

I hope this is clear because it is very important.

We are not to struggle through the Christian life blindly, hoping for the best. If we do that we have succumbed to the wiles of the devil. No wonder then that we are defeated by constant frustration, discouragement, uncertainty, and all the other manifestations of the devil's work. We are expected to give intelligent consideration to the process of overcoming, and to learning how to counteract the attacks of the devil on our lives. It is the armor of God which sets this forth.

If we do not bother to use the armor, we need not wonder that we succumb to the wiles of the devil, for the only thing that can possibly meet the subtlety, the cunning, the williness of the attacks of Satan is the armor of God.

are a figurative way of explaining or expounding the phrase, "you in me," i.e., the Christian in Christ. When we came to Jesus Christ and believed in him, we were "in Christ," we had a different basis of living. The Bible says, those who do this are "transferred, translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God," {cf, Col 1:13}. We are said to be "in Christ," and have found Christ to be the ground of truth and key to life. He is the secret of the universe -- all truth relates to him, all truth comes from him. By him all things were made and exist, and there is no explanation of reality except that which leads ultimately to the figure and person of Jesus Christ. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," {Col 2:3}.

Then, further, we found that we are invited by God to rest upon Christ's righteousness. We do not stand before God on the ground of our own puny efforts to have done good, or to have behaved ourselves so as to have pleased him. We stand in Christ's righteousness and his perfections are imputed to us. In the experience of the cross, God has transferred our sin to him and transferred his righteousness to us. This is the ground of our acceptance before God and the answer to the problem of human guilt from which we have suffered. Then we learned that Christ is our peace. He is the source of our sense of calmness, of quietness, of well-being. He is the ground of our morale. Those are the first three pieces of the armor. We have these if we are Christians at all, and we begin our defense against the devil and his wiles by reminding ourselves of these great facts.

The last three pieces of this armor describe what it means for Christ to be in the Christian, i.e., Christ appropriated, applied to actual life. These three pieces are very practical and highly important to us. In the message we saw what it means to take "the shield of faith, wherewith we are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one," {Eph 6:17}. We saw that taking the shield of faith means to come to practical righteousness from the ground on which we are standing in Christ, which we have taken in him. That is, if Christ is our righteousness, if Christ is our peace, if Jesus Christ is our peace, then this and this is true, and that is not true. Thinking it through, we come to a "therefore." We draw a practical conclusion and thus we resist the thoughts which arise within us which tempt us to doubt, or lust, or immorality, weakness, confusion, and uncertainty. Thus we resist the devil.

We saw that the shield of faith is supremely important. It is adequate in itself to defeat all the fiery darts of the wicked one. The reason we so often experience weakness is that we do not actually take it. We come to muddle through. We do not do intelligently what God says and apply the shield of faith, i.e., this shield of faith through from the ground of faith we have taken.

There are only two pieces of the armor left -- the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. We will now examine what is meant by this phrase, "the helmet of salvation."

The figure of a helmet immediately suggests to us that this is something designed to protect the head, the intelligence, the ability to think and reason.

We saw that the breastplate was the protection of our emotional life. When you figuratively put on your breastplate of righteousness, you are assuming a position in him which protects you from the effects of guilt and unforgiveness -- the most common ground of disturbance to the emotions. It is because of this that we get emotionally upset and depressed, and the breastplate protects us there. The shoes, already seen, protect us in the area of our will. The shoes of the gospel of peace (Christ as our peace) are the readiness and willingness within us. It is our motivations which are dealt with here. Christ as our peace motivates us and makes us ready to face life.

But the helmet is designed for the head, for the intelligence, the mind. If we follow through consistently with the application of these pieces, we will discover that this is something Christ is doing in us, and through us, in the world. This helmet can keep our thinking straight and preserve us from mental confusion and darkness.

Stop a minute here.

I would like to ask you this: As you look at the world in which we are living, is there anything more desperately needed than this? Is there anything which could possibly be more relevant to the situation?

we find ourselves than this factor which will keep us thinking straight? Was there ever a time when we were more frankly bewildered than they are in our day, or when statesmen were more openly confused in admitting it? The intelligentsia confess being utterly baffled in dealing with the problems with which our society is confronted.

A woman said to me last week, "I don't know what to believe about Vietnam. I don't know how to decide whether we should be there or not. I just don't know what to believe."

Paul is talking about the day of resurrection, the day of the coming again of Christ, the day when we will be delivered from its bondage, when Christ returns to establish his kingdom. This helmet, therefore, is our recognition that all human schemes to obtain world peace and harmony are doomed to fail. But, through these failures, Jesus Christ is working out his own plan which will culminate in his appearing again and the establishment of his own reign in righteousness on the earth. That is the helmet of salvation which you must wear to keep your thinking straight in the hour of man's utter confusion and darkness.

The principle of God's working is declared over and over again in Scripture. It is written for all to see, "For as the clay is of the earth and of the flesh," God says, "shall glory in my presence," {cf, 1 Cor 1:29 KJV}. In other words, nothing that man can boast of shall contribute one iota to the final solution of the human dilemma. It is all of God. He works by it and nothing that man does, as man, contributes one thing to this. Not all of human wisdom, no man's vaunted knowledge, or our scientific discoveries will contribute one thing to the ultimate solution. In the record of Scripture, all that man boasts in shall crumble into dust, and those things which are of God shall be shaken, and only "those which cannot be shaken shall remain," {Heb 12:27 KJV}. Those are the things of God. No flesh shall glory in his presence.

But that is not the whole idea. Do not stop there. If you do, you will be guilty of the extremism which the devil keeps us off balance and eccentric in our thinking. God is working through these events of history as he is working out his purposes on a basis totally different from the aims and goals of men. That is the helmet of salvation. Therefore, Christians are not to be taken in by the unreal and groundless expectations of the world, nor are they to withdraw from these and isolate themselves. Christians are to be involved in the world, going on in the world for wholly different reasons than the worlding has:

Christians are to be involved in order to accomplish God's desire to confront men everywhere, at every level, in all enterprises of life, with the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

If we see that, it will save so much heartache, delusion, disappointment, and confusion as you read the newspaper. Nothing could be more important than this.

Why is it that thoughtful minds like H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw and others are simply puzzled and bewildered by what they find in life? It is because they pinned their hopes on wholly unstable resources. As the Dean of Melbourne wrote concerning H. G. Wells:

He hailed science as a panacea for all ills and the goddess of knowledge and power. In a series of popular scientific romances he visualized the ~~ultimate~~ ^{shape} of Things to Come as ~~the~~ ^{the} Food of the Gods and described a future of bigger and better men. He spoke of a planned world, of eugenics, of mechanized labor, of scientific diet and scientific education.

How much we still hear these phrases tossed about in our own day! But all of this fails. These things are their grandiose dreams on a cloud, a cobweb, a shifting, shimmering illusion. And when the illusion is in its true shape, as all illusions eventually must, then their castles in the clouds came tumbling down. That has been the repeated pattern of history for twenty or more centuries -- men building upon shifting, ephemeral things, instead of on the unshakable things which always remain to which the Scriptures give testimony.

So the Christian has a helmet of salvation. He has a hope for the future. He has an understanding of what God is working out his purposes and therefore he is not disturbed when human programs go wrong and fail -- when the New Deal, and the Fair Deal, and the Great Society, and all the other fancy names for human progress end up in the same old place -- time after time after time. The Christian has learned to expect rumors of wars unto the very end. He expects false teachings and false philosophies and cults and sects to abound. He is told all this will happen. It is part of the program, part of the total overall plan and the moving of God in history. The Christian knows that wars are unavoidable, even though every effort is made to avoid them, and that there is no contradiction in this. The Christian knows that war is man's only thing which is really solved by war. But he knows also that we are living in a mad world, a world which is deluded by silken, subtle, satanic lies which are deliberately designed to end up in the mangling and destruction of the bodies and souls of men.

Therefore, when he sees things happening as they are happening in Vietnam these days, he knows it is unrealistic to expect to stop all this by passing certain legislation, or declaring certain principles, or even to negotiate at a peace table. The world is in such a state and condition that the Christian knows that the innocent and the weak will suffer, and nothing much can be done about it at times. The blame lies with the stubborn refusal of men everywhere to believe the true nature of the problem and the remedy that love has fully provided. The Christian knows that demonic forces can rise and possess the world for a time, and will do so, and every human scheme to control these will ultimately fail.

What shall we do, then?

Shall we withdraw from life?

Shall we give ourselves to building our own little airtight capsule of life and look forward to retirement?

Shall we rise up and fight the United Nations or let the world go to hell? God forgive us, this too has been the answer of Christians these days.

The helmet of hope not only tells us that these things are happening and will happen, but that a new salvation is coming, and that it is even now at work. This is what we need to know. Not merely that things will finally end right, but that the ending is being worked out now! History is not a meaningless jumble

so confused in this day, and saying so little to the world of true significance, is because it has laid aside, and large, the hope of the coming of the Lord. There are very few sermons preached on it, very little written about it. There is no time given to a consideration of what it means, and why it is set forth so prominently and so clearly, in the Scriptures. Great sections of the Scriptures that deal with this matter are simply neglected among Christians. As a result, our thinking is muddled and confused. The church does not know what to take or where to stand. It has nothing to say, or, at best, it gives an uncertain sound which causes confusion and discourages the heart.

We are to remind ourselves frequently of the coming of the Lord.

How many times did he say, "Watch! Watch therefore. That you may be ready for that hour," {Matthew 24:42}

attack of the devil, to fight back, and to overcome. The Christian does this by putting on the armor.

This passage addresses itself to us in a figurative way, but it is speaking of very realistic things we have captured in this series.

We have already seen that the armor is Christ: Christ Jesus made available to us day by day. The first piece of this armor pictures Christ as the truth, i.e., the basic secret to life, the ground of reality; as our righteousness, the One on whose merits we stand before God and are accepted; and Christ as the source of our morale, of our inner strength, of that which gives purpose to life. All this is fulfilled in the Lord's words, "you in me," {John 14:20b}. Then the last three pieces of this armor set forth the truth about "you" {John 14:20c} -- Christ appropriated and applied to life. We looked at the shield of faith, which is applying general truth to specific situations, i.e., acting upon our belief. Nothing can be done without God's power is made available only in faith. Then we looked at the helmet of hope, which is to use the return of Jesus Christ as a guide in evaluating the worth of movements in our own day, a guide in a world where history is going, what is happening, and where it will all come out.

Now we come to the last of these pieces of the armor of the Christian -- "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

The first thing we must say immediately about it is that, again, this is Christ. Christ is our life, if we are Christians at all, but this is Christ made available to us in practical ways through the sayings of his Word. I think it is very important to stress this. It is so easy to be Christians in general, but not in specific situations. It is very easy to have a vague sense of following Christ, but not know exactly, in specific terms, what that means. But that is why the Word of God has been given to us, for it is that which makes Christianity meaningful.

Christian truth as a whole is more than we can handle. It has to be broken down into manageable pieces. The Word of God is what the Word of God does.

In writing to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God," {Col 3:16 RSV}. By this he is indicating that the authority of Christ and the authority of the Scripture are one and the same. There are many today who challenge the authority of Christ and the authority of the Scripture. There are many voices which tell us that as Christians we must follow Christ and accept the authority of the Bible. But Paul answers that one by calling the Scripture "the word of Christ." You cannot separate the two.

Once I attended a meeting of ministers in Palo Alto. We were listening to a Stanford professor, who was a Christian, read a very excellent and helpful paper on "Science and the Christian Faith." After he had finished, certain questions were addressed to him by members of the group. One man said, "Sir, I can accept the authority of Christ as a witness of certain men to what they thought of Jesus Christ. But you seem to go further. You use the word 'inspired' on several occasions in your paper, and this seems to suggest that in your opinion the authority of the Bible is more than the views of men, that it has divine authority. Is this true?" The Christian professor gave a very wise answer. He said, "My answer may sound to you very much like Sunday school propaganda. I can only put it this way: The center of my life is Jesus Christ. I have found him to be the key to the fulfillment of my desire in life. And yet I could know nothing about Christ if I did not learn it from the Bible. The Bible is the Word of Christ, and Christ defines the Bible. How can I make a distinction?" With considerable embarrassment the questioner threw up his hands and changed the subject.

The authority of Scripture is the authority of Jesus Christ. They are indivisible. To attempt to distinguish between the two is like asking which blade of a pair of scissors is more important, or which leg of a pair of pants is more necessary. We know Christ through the Bible, and we understand the Bible through the knowledge of Christ. The two cannot be separated. That is why Paul calls it "the word of Christ."

Now in the phrase, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," it is important to see that the Word of God is the complete Bible which is referred to by the phrase, "the word of God." Let us do a little donkey work. I will permit me. There are two words used in Scripture for "the word of God." There is the familiar

logos which is used in the opening verse of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word (Logos) which was with God, and the Logos was God," {John 1:1}. Then there is another word, used less

one will bother to read it. They desire to create such false images of the biblical records that no one takes them seriously.

These speakers and professors and doctors of theology claim to be theologians and Bible scholars but they betray the Scriptures with the kiss of Judas and mislead millions. The main aim, of course, is to keep people away from reading the Bible, from seriously and thoughtfully reading the Scriptures. For, of course, all that is needed to answer these pretentious claims is simply to read these accounts in a thoughtful and serious manner.

Let me illustrate this with the Christmas story. Nothing is more basic and central to the Christian faith than the story of the way the infinite God became a babe in a manger, and was welcomed with the appearance of a brilliant star, the coming of the shepherds and wise men. We love the simple beauty of this ancient story. This simple story transforms the world, at least outwardly, for a brief time every year, and has for two thousand years. But now listen to the way the false prophets of our day treat this story. Here is a quotation from a well-known book by Bishop Robinson, *Home To God*:

Suppose the whole notion of a God who visits the earth in the person of his Son is as mythical as the prince in the fairy story. Suppose there is no realm 'out there' from which the man from heaven arrives. Suppose the Christmas myth (the invasion of this side by the other side), as opposed to the Christmas story (the birth of the man, Jesus of Nazareth), has to go. Are we prepared for that? Or are we to cling here to this last vestige of the mythological or metaphysical world view as the only garb in which to clothe the story with the power to touch the imagination? Cannot perhaps the supernaturalist scheme survive at least as part of the 'magic' of Christmas?

Then he goes on to say, yes, it may survive, but it survives only as a myth, i.e., as a pretty story that indicates importance and captures the attention. Then he adds:

But we must be able to read the Nativity story without assuming that its truth depends on there being a link between the interpretation of the natural by the supernatural, that Jesus can only be 'Immanuel' 'God with us' if, as it were, he comes through from another world. For as supernaturalism becomes less and less credible, to tie the action of God to such a way of thinking is to banish it for increasing numbers into the preserve of pagan myths and thereby to sever it from any real connection with history. As Christmas becomes a pretty story, naturalism is left in possession of the field as the only alternative with any claim to the allegiance of intelligent men.

Notice, there is no attempt at all (and there is none throughout the book), to disprove the supernaturalism of the biblical story -- they are merely dismissed with a wave of the hand. Scorn is heaped upon them.

Jesus, our Emmanuel.

We need only remember that this simple, uncomplicated story was widely accepted and widely proclaimed in the first century. Along with the account of the cross and the resurrection, this story has changed the world.

No Christian in the Scripture ever denies it. No apostle, or even Jesus himself, ever questions the accuracy of the account. The Bible never suggests that these did not take place exactly as recorded. And the stories were well-known to all.

In other words, this account reflects the inherent ability of truth, simply told, to compel belief, without the aid of any special support. As we read the account, it wins the submission of our reason, it appeals to the love of the heart, and it compels the obedience of the will. To reject it, therefore, is to violate our basic humanity. This is what Paul declares in a letter written toward the close of the first century that this story is one of the tests of true teachers, that if someone denies the incarnation and says Jesus did not come in the flesh, he is self-deceived and is an antichrist.

This is the purpose of these "sayings of God." They are a sword of the Spirit to defend against the attacks of the world which would undermine and attack ultimate authority.

Looking back in my own life, I am aware of many times when this sword of the Spirit has saved me from the error and delusion of some kind or other.

- As a young Christian, I was stopped at the edge of disobedience many times when some temptation seemed so logical, so reasonable, so widely practiced that I was allured by it. I was often reminded of a word I had memorized as a young Christian and which has come to me many times since. It is from the book of Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding." {cf, Prov 3:5}. It is so easy to think that because something looks so logical to us it must be right. But this fails to recognize the fact that we are easily deceived. We are not the rational creatures we think we are. There is much illusion and delusion in our world and we are not intelligent enough to see through these phantasmas, these lies. Therefore the word comes, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart" -- believing the truth as it is revealed, and "lean not to your own understanding."
- Sometimes a sword of the Spirit has been placed in my hand, not before defeat, but right in the middle of it, or right afterward. It has thus become the means of preventing any painful recurrence. I can remember when a word from James came home to me with unusual power after a very violent and nasty display of temper on my part. A verse came flashing into my mind which I had read in the book of James, "The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God," {Jas 1:20 RSV}. That verse arrested me. I thought, here I am, claiming to be interested in working the righteousness of God, and what am I doing? Losing my temper, flaring up at someone, and then thinking I am accomplishing what God has sent me to do. That verse stopped me then and has been a help ever since.
- I remember when my heart was once pierced with another word from the book of Proverbs: "Pride comes contention," {cf, Prov 13:10 KJV}. When we get involved in contentions and strife with one another it is so easy to blame the other fellow. "He started it!" One day one of my sons and my daughter were fighting and I asked them, "Who started this?" And the boy said, "She hit me back." This is so human, is it not? Ah, but the Word says, "Only by pride comes contention." Where there is strife and contention there is pride at work and both parties are usually guilty.
- As a young Christian I recall how the powerful lure to sexual misbehavior which exists in the world was frequently dispelled in my thinking by the remembrance, the sudden flashing recollection of a word in Ephesians 5: "Let no man deceive you with empty words [and that is exactly what the world does] that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience," {Eph 5:6 RSV}. This arrested me when I first heard it. Later, when I came to understand more fully what the wrath of God means, it is not a lightning bolt from heaven or an auto accident or something like that, but rather a certain disintegration of life, the dehumanizing, the brutalization of life which comes when one yields to these kinds of things -- it took on even more power in my life.

Several years ago there was a man who came to me every week for over a year. He was in the grip of a deep depression of spirit, an utter desolation of mind. I have never met such a lonely, miserable outcast. He shut himself away from everyone. His liberation began by repeatedly praying one single phrase:

Scripture -- all the Scripture he could, in faith, lay hold of. Everything else I tried to point out to him I reject. But one phrase stuck with him and he prayed it again and again: "Not my will but thine be done." At last, slowly, like the sun coming up, the light began to come, and you could see the change in his life. He is living a normal, free life, set free by the saying of God -- "the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God."

Obviously, the greater exposure there is to Scripture, the more the Spirit can use this mighty sword in our lives. If you never read or study your Bible, you are terribly exposed to defeat and despair. You have no defense, you have nothing to put up against these forces that are at work.

Therefore, read your Bible regularly.

Read all of Scripture, for each section has a special purpose.

The Christian who neglects the reading of the Scriptures is in direct disobedience to the will of the Father.

The Lord Jesus said, "It is they [the Scriptures] that bear witness to me," (John 5:39). This is the way to come to know Christ. There is no way apart from the Scriptures. And there is no way to come into spiritual maturity as a Christian apart from the Scriptures.

Finally, what is the responsibility of the Christian when the Spirit places one of these sayings in your mind on some appropriate occasion? What are you to do? The apostle says, take it! Heed it! Obey it! Do not treat it lightly. Take it seriously. The Spirit of God has brought it to mind for a purpose; therefore heed it, obey it.

Now, one word of caution is needed here. We are also to compare Scripture with Scripture. This is an important matter, for remember, the devil can quote Scripture as well -- as he did on one occasion with our Lord. But the quotation of the Scripture by the devil is never balanced. The sword of the Spirit in our hands is an uncouth weapon, out of balance, eccentric.

Remember how Jesus himself gave us a great example of this when the devil came to tempt him in the wilderness. Satan said to Jesus, "If thou be the Son of God, turn these stones into bread," {cf, Matt 4:3 KJV}. Jesus immediately met him with the sword of the Spirit. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone,'" {Matt 4:4, Luke 4:4}. That is, my physical life is not the highest part of my being. I do not have to sustain that, but I do have to sustain my relationship with God. That is the important thing. I do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," {Matt 4:4 RSV}.

Then the devil tried a new tack. He came to him and said, "Oh well, if you are going to quote Scripture, I will quote it too. There is a verse in the Psalms, you know, that says if you get yourself into a dangerous situation, God will send his angels to uphold you." Taking Jesus to the top of the temple, he said, "Cast yourself down from this height and all the crowd around will see and know that you are the Son of God. If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down, for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee from harm, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone,'" {cf, Luke 4:9-11 KJV}. But Jesus knew how to handle the devil. Jesus said, "It is written again..." I urge you to take note of this: "It is written again..." It is not enough to have someone quote a verse of Scripture to you, or to have one come flashing into your mind. It is in balance? Is it held in relationship to other truth in the Word of God? "It is written again, 'Do not tempt the Lord your God,'" {cf, Luke 4:12}. It is this word which delivered Jesus in that hour.

Then, you remember, the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said, "All these shall be yours if you fall down and worship me," {cf, Matt 4:9}. And again our Lord answered him with the sword of the Spirit: "It is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou worship,'" {Matt 4:10}. Then, the account says, the devil left him. This is always what happens. He is put to flight by the sword of the Spirit. This is the sword which is placed in our hands.

This is the last piece of the Christian's armor. Here is the Christian's complete armor: You in Christ, Christ in you -- Christ, demonstrated as truth and experienced as righteousness and peace; and Christ

appropriated by faith and applied to life through the hope of salvation and the sayings of God. This is the need. With this you can take anything life can throw at you. You do not need tranquilizers or expensive psychiatric treatments. You may need some physical therapy now and again -- the Word of God helps against that -- but you will not need all the remedies science has now made available to give us a bolstering in the hour of anxiety or fear. You have the armor of God -- if you are a Christian.

If you are not a Christian there is no help for you. The place to begin is to become a Christian. The Word of God has no comfort to give to those who are not Christians. It has nothing to say to support or encourage someone who is not a Christian. The only way to escape from the allurements and deceitfulness of the world is to become a Christian. You must be delivered by the work of Jesus Christ from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God. Then you can put on the armor of God.

Think it through. Become familiar with this armor.

Learn how to use it, and then actually use it when you are under attack. Practice going through the fire, feel yourself under attack from Satan. Like a soldier in battle, put it to work.

What good is armor if it rusts unused in a closet? No wonder Christians are constantly failing. They may have the armor of God, they do not employ it. If you feel yourself growing cold or lukewarm,

ADVICE WHEN ATTACKED

by Ray C. Stedman

We are drawing near the close of our study in Paul's great exhortation found in Chapter 6 of Ephesians, beginning with these words in Verse 10:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {Eph 6:10-11 RSV}

Though we have developed this in some detail in these studies, we have been following a very simple approach:

We looked first at the struggle, the conflict against what Paul calls, "the world rulers of this present age" {Eph 6:12 RSV}, as suggesting to us the only adequate explanation of what is going on in our world and has been for many centuries. We saw that this struggle is synonymous with life as we know it. Paul describes what is happening right where you are in the midst of the world, with evil rampant around seemingly everybody and everything doing all they can to discourage you, drag you down, and defeat you. Paul put it, in a vivid description of his own experience, "fightings within and fears without," {cf, Eph 6:12 RSV, 1 Thim 3:5}.

Second, we tried to spend some time with what the apostle says should be our response to this conflict described in the phrase, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," {cf, Eph 6:13}. This is a tremendously practical section describing how Jesus Christ (who is the armor that is provided for us) can meet our moral and spiritual need. We learned here what to do when doubts assail us, fears dismay us, false teaching deludes us, or coldness prevails in our lives. Now we go a step further and explore the second thing the apostle says the Christian should do when he is in conflict with the wiles, the stratagems, the devious suggestiveness of the devil.

The first defense, he says, is to put on the armor of God. We have looked at that {cf, Eph 6:14-17}. The second defense is to pray. Two steps: put on the armor of God, and pray.

That brings us to Verses 18-20 of Chapter 6:

Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that my message may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. {Eph 6:18-20 RSV}

There is a very strong and powerful relationship between putting on the armor of God and praying. These things belong together; in fact, one grows out of the other. It is not enough to put on the armor of God; you must also pray. It is not enough to pray; you must also have put on the armor of God. It is impossible to do these two.

As we have been attempting to see, putting on the armor of God is not something merely figurative. It is an actual thing you do. It is remembering what Christ is to you, and thinking through the implications of that in terms of your present struggle and experience. Putting on the armor is essentially something that happens in the realm of your thought life. We have been trying to make that clear. It is an adjustment of the attitude of the heart to reality, to things as they really are. It is thinking through the implications of the fact which God's Word discloses. This is always the necessary thing to do in trying to face life.

Our problem with life is that we do not see it as it is. We are so deluded by it, we suffer from su

illusions. It looks to us to be quite different than it is and this is why we desperately need and must have the revelation of the facts of Scripture. Life is what God has declared it to be. When we face it on that level and discover the revelation is right, it is accurate, it does describe what is happening. And more, it tells us why things happen and what lies behind them. All this is part of putting on this armor, appropriating Christ's life in terms of your present situation. It is all done in the realm of the thought life.

What do you do when you put on the breastplate of righteousness? You think of Christ and what righteousness means to you as imparted to you. What do you do when you take up the sword of the Spirit? You give heed, as we saw, to those flashes of Scripture, those portions of the Word of God that come into your mind that have immediate application to the situation you are facing. But again, this all is done in the realm of the thought life. At first it takes time to work all this through. This is something we have to learn to do. As we learn how to do it, the process becomes much more rapid. Almost instantaneously we can apply this line of approach to the problems we are facing. This is what Paul calls, in the second letter to the Corinthians, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," {2 Cor 10:5 KJV}.

I stress that this is done in the realm of the thought life because this is very important, for it is the order: first to think and not to do. It is a violation of our basic humanity merely to think and not have that thought result in some activity. This is where many Christians go astray. They are content to think about doctrinal matters, think through these great facts revealed about the gospel and about life, but never make any application in any way. As I have suggested, this is very dangerous because we human beings are made to think and to do, and it must be in that order. We receive information first, we assimilate it, we think it through. This is the first thing. And then we act upon that which we have both thought and felt in our emotions and our mind, working upon our will, bring us at last to activity. This is the normal and proper procedure for human living.

All our doing must and will grow out of thinking. Sometimes we speak of "thoughtless" actions. We say someone that "he acted thoughtlessly." Actually this is impossible. You cannot act thoughtlessly. What we really mean is that someone has acted with very superficial, shallow thinking. But it is actually impossible to act without having first thought. Yet it is possible to think without ever acting. That is what that is bringing us to here. To think without doing is inevitably frustrating. It is like cooking and never eating. You can imagine how frustrating that would be. It is like writing letters that you never mail. Your friend would be glad of that, but it is very frustrating to you! So the complement to putting on the armor of God, which results from it, is to pray.

First to think through and then to pray.

Notice the order of this. This is extremely important. The apostle does not reverse this and say, first to pray and then put on the armor of God. This is what we try to do, and this is why our prayer life is so feeble and impotent. There is great practical help here if we follow carefully the designated order of Scripture. Most Christians, if they were honest, would confess that they are dissatisfied with their prayer life. It is inadequate and perhaps infrequent. All of us at times struggle to improve ourselves. Sometimes we struggle to improve the quality as well as the quantity of our prayer lives. Sometimes we adopt schedules to maintain, or long lists of names and projects and places we try to remember in prayer, or we attempt to discipline ourselves in some way to a greater ministry in this realm. In other words, we begin with the doing, but when we do this we are starting at the wrong place. We are violating our basic human nature by starting this way. The place to start is not with the doing, but with the thinking.

This is always the place to start in motivating human life, and this is what the apostle suggests. It is first to put on the armor of God. It is a natural, normal outgrowth. Now, I am not suggesting that there is no need for Christian discipline; there is. I am not suggesting that we will not need to take our wills and put them to the task and follow through. There is this need. But the place where discipline should come in is not, first, in prayer, but in doing what is involved in "putting on the armor of God." First, think through the implications of our faith, and then prayer will follow naturally much more easily. When it comes in that order it will be thoughtful prayer, prayer which has meaning and significance. It will be relevant prayer.

This is the problem with much of our praying now, is it not? It is so shallow, so superficial, on a

This is a wonderful study in prayer. Paul is saying there are three simple principles involved in pray

1. First, worry about nothing. Be anxious for nothing. Christian friends, do you hear what the Lord says? Worry about nothing! This is one of the major problems in Christian living today. Worry is one of the major reasons why Christians are oftentimes a stumbling block to non-Christians. And, conversely, it is also one of the major areas in which Christians can be a glowing testimony and witness to non-Christians. It depends upon whether you worry or do not worry -- one or the other. Christians are continually exhorted in Scripture to worry about nothing. Now that does not mean not to have a proper interest and concern about things. It is not stoicism that is advocated here. But we are not to be anxious, fretful, worried. Yet this is so often the attitude of our lives.

Someone said, "I'm so loaded up with worries that if anything happened to me this week it would be two weeks before I could get around to worrying about it!"

Sometimes we make an artificial attempt to cure our worrying by will power. As another ha

I've joined the new 'Don't Worry Club'
And now I hold my breath;
I'm so scared I'm going to worry
That I'm worried half to death.

But the admonition is, "Worry about nothing." This is only possible when you have put on the armor of God. Do not attempt it on any other basis. Worry comes from fear, and the only thing that can dissolve fear is facts. Therefore, to put on the armor of God is to face the facts just as they are, as they appear to be in the illusive picture that the world gives us, but squarely as they are. Do not worry about anything. You are to worry about nothing.

2. What is the second principle? Pray about everything. Everything!

Someone says, "You mean God is interested in little things as well as big things?" Is there anything that is big to God? They are all little things to him. Of course he is interested in them; he knows the hairs on our head are numbered by him. Jesus was at great pains to show us that God is interested in the most minute details of our life -- concerned about everything. Therefore pray about everything. Talk it over, tell him about things.

3. And what is the result? You will be kept through anything. This is the third principle: "The peace of God which passes all understanding [which no one can explain, which is there despite the most difficult circumstances, and which certainly does not arise out of a change of circumstances -- which is inexplicable] will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Do you know anything more that can be said in this troubled, anxious, fretful, weary, disturbed world?

Prayer reveals three facts:

When we pray we recognize, first, the existence of an invisible kingdom. We would never pray at all if we did not have some awareness that someone is listening, that there is behind the realm of visibility another realm, another kingdom. It is not far off in space somewhere; it is right here. It surrounds us on every side. We are always in touch with it, though we do not always recognize it. It lies behind the facade of life, and all the promises of the Scriptures are exhortations to take heed of this, reckon with it, deal with it, acknowledge that it is there.

The second fact prayer reveals is that we Christians have confidence that the kingdom of God is not only real and significant, that it affects our lives directly, that the visible things which are happening in our world are the result of something happening in the realm of invisibility. Therefore, if you want to change the visible things, you must start with the invisibilities.

Third, and perhaps the fact most hotly contested by the devil and his forces, is that our prayers are an essential part in bringing God's invisible power to bear on visible life. In other words, God answers prayer. Prayer is purposeful and powerful. It is not pitiful and pathetic pleading with only a rare chance that it might be answered. No, it is powerful. God answers! Prayer is an essential link in the working of

world today. Without it he does not often work; with it he certainly does. These three facts are a matter of prayer.

But now we must immediately add that God answers prayer according to his promises. This is so say today, for there is a very vague and undefined but widespread concept that God answers any prayer, that no matter what you want or how you ask for it, he commits himself to give it. This, results frequently in disappointments and gives rise to the widespread belief that prayer is ineffective, God answers every prayer which is based upon a promise.

Prayer does not start with us; it starts with God. God must say he will do something before we ask him to do it. This is the point.

This is how it works with a father and his children. No parent commits himself to give his children anything they want, anything they ask for. He makes it clear to them that he will do certain things and not others. In the realm of those limits, the father commits himself to answer his children's requests. God. God has given promises and they form the only proper basis for supplication.

This is what Paul means by his reminder that we are to pray at all times in the Spirit. In the Spirit is a great area of misunderstanding about prayer. Many take this phrase, "in the Spirit," as though descriptive of the emotions we should have when we pray. They think it is necessary to be greatly earnest before prayer can be effectual, that we must pray with deep earnestness of words. Now, this is true sometimes, but it is not essential or necessary to the effectiveness of prayer. And it is certainly not what this phrase, "in the Spirit."

To judge by the expression of many, one would perhaps feel that this phrase means to pray with earnestness. But it does not mean that. It has no relationship to the emotions that we feel in prayer. Praying in the Spirit is not descriptive of some kind of religious hydrophobia.

Well, what is it then? It means to pray according to the promises which the Spirit has given, and to pray in the name of God which the Spirit has made known. This is praying in the Spirit. God has never promised to answer any prayer, but he does promise to answer prayer in a way that he has carefully outlined for us. He answers invariably and without partiality. He is no respecter of persons in this matter of prayer. In the realm of personal needs (those needs which call forth most of our prayers), the need for wisdom, perhaps for patience, or grace, or strength -- in this realm God's promise, specifically and definitely, is to answer prayer immediately. He always immediately answers this type of prayer.

I do not have time to go into this, for it is a vast subject, and there is much more which could be learned from other portions of Scripture. But I want to emphasize now that the apostle is saying we must take the matter of prayer seriously and learn what God has promised. In other words, master this subject as you master any other subject you give yourself to. You scientists have mastered various areas in the realm of science. You teachers have learned to master the art of teaching. You artisans have mastered your craft. You have worked at it, you have given time to it. Now learn to master the art of praying. For though prayer is the simplest thing in the world -- a word of conversation with God -- it also can become the very deepest and most profound thing in the world. When you grow in your prayer life you will discover that God is very interested about prayer, and that, through it, he makes his omnipotence and omniscience available to us in the realm of specific promises.

When you learn to pray on this basis you will discover that exciting and otherwise unexpected things are constantly happening, that there is a quiet but mighty power at work upon which you can rely. As you learn to pray in this way you find there is put at your disposal a tremendous weapon, a mighty power which can influence your own life and the lives of others. The illustrations of this are far too numerous for me to mention, but they are unmistakable to those who experience them. Especially is this true in the realm of the attack of the enemy. I want to say more about this in the last message of this series.

One final point: This matter of praying applies to others besides ourselves.

We are not alone in this battle, this conflict with doubt, dismay, fear, confusion, and uncertainty. others around us who are weaker and younger in Christ than we are, and still others who are stronger and we all are fighting this battle together. We cannot put on the armor of God for another person, we can only pray for that other person. We can call in reinforcements when we find him engaged in a struggle that he can handle for the moment, or perhaps for which he is not fully equipped, or if he has not yet

here but is certainly implied in these next words.] perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth [there is the opening of the mind] and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. {2 Tim 2:24-26 RSV}

And from the letter of James:

My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. {Jas 5:19-20 RSV}

Prayer

Our Father, we know so little about these great realities -- especially this mighty ministry of prayer. We pray that you will teach us to pray. Forgive us for the way oftentimes we have looked at prayer as though it were unimportant, insignificant, optional. Help us to take it seriously. Help us to realize that you have made this our point of contact with you. We would pray, then, as the disciples prayed: "Lord, teach us to pray." In your name, Amen.

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By: Ray C. Stedman
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THE INFALLIBLE POSTURE

by Ray C. Stedman

For some time now we have been studying the great passage at the close of Paul's letter to the

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {Eph 6:10-11 RSV}

We have looked at the struggle of life in the light of Paul's great revelation that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world's present darkness, the strongholds of wickedness in high places. We have seen that all that happens to us in our lives as Christians which discourages us, defeats us, confuses us, or renders us indifferent to the great truth of God is part of the struggle. It is a manifestation of this conflict in which we are engaged. As we look back upon a year just ended, we have been aware of failure, of problems, of weakness, of obstinacy and stubbornness, and other things in our life of which we are not proud. These again have been manifestations of the struggle in which we are engaged. We are looking forward now to a new year and we know it, to a time of conflict, another time of struggle. What can we do about this? How can we fight back? In practical terms, what can we do about the struggle we face? This is what has engaged us in this passage.

The answer, as we have seen so far, is twofold:

First, we are to put on the armor of God. Paul says, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The clear implication is that if we do not put on the whole armor we will not be able to stand. If we are doubtful about that, life itself will prove it to us. We cannot stand without this armor which, as we have seen, is figurative language for something very real. It is real because we are in Christ and what Christ is to us now, in very practical terms. "Put on the whole armor of God,"

can do nothing else but hope to stand where we are. There are times when doubts plague us. We are subjected to intellectual attacks and we find we have all we can do to assert any degree of faith at all. There are times and circumstances into which we come when we are overwhelmed with fears and anxieties and we are unable to keep our heads, because we are under pressure. There are times when indifference seems to be our only spiritual strength so much we lose all our vitality. It drains away our will to act, our motivation, and we are unable to make ourselves do the simplest things to maintain faith.

This is all part of the struggle. We get disturbed when we see our growth in the Christian life apparently stopped. Our ministry or our witness seems to be impossible or ineffective. All the challenge and knowledge of our spiritual life is gone. What are we to do then? Paul says we are to gird up our loins, put on the armor of God, pray, and having done all, stand! Putting on the armor and praying will not necessarily change the circumstances. Then what? Then stand! Stay right where you are until the attack lessens. This is the word.

Everywhere the Word of God warns us that, as we draw nearer the time of our Lord's return, evil days will come more frequently. The Bible has always told us there will be evil days, but sometimes we read the predictions wrong. For instance, there is a passage in First Timothy 4 that refers to the latter times. The Holy Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful doctrines of demons," {1 Tim 4:1 RSV}. We read that as though it were a prediction of the closing of the age. But the "latter times" means the whole of the age, from our Lord's first coming until His return. Paul is not talking about one particular time of trouble reserved for the last moment; he is talking about repetitive cycles of trouble which come again and again throughout the whole course of these latter times.

But the Word also makes clear that these cycles become fiercer in intensity and more widespread as the age draws to its close. There is a growing awareness in our day that we live in a one-world. We no longer are separated from other peoples by great distances of thought or time. What happens on the other side of the world today affects us tomorrow. We are very much aware of this.

Evil days were once limited geographically. In the past, persecution grew intense in various places and economic pressures became severe in certain areas while in other areas things were fine. But now, as the world goes on, these areas of trouble become more widespread. Now they are worldwide in their impact. We do not have to press this point. In America, we must realize we are living on an island of relative peace and security in the midst of an enormous sea of trouble and distress. That sea is constantly eroding our relative security. It is an irresistibly rising tide, the lapping of whose waters we can already hear. Things are not getting better in our world, but worsening. Any honest person, facing world conditions, must see this. The vaunted solutions of sincere men are not working. The approaches to these problems upon which men pin their faith -- such as education, scientific discoveries, economic improvements, better legislation -- these things are not working.

Not that they do not have their place; we are not suggesting they be discarded. They are working to a certain degree, but they are not solving the problem. It is getting worse, because, as we have seen all along, the answer never lies in these superficial, surface realms. It lies much deeper, in the hearts and souls of men. It is the domination of cruel and resistless power that dominates the world, whom Paul calls "the world ruler of the present darkness." Only the delivering strength of Jesus Christ is adequate to deal with them.

That is the world we are facing in 1966, and because of it, there are many who are faltering in the very week the newspapers in our area reported the resignation from the Christian ministry of a man who was very closely associated with us here. He is giving up his ministry, and doing so, he says, because he no longer can stand it, no longer can face it. This man's ministry was once in the power and effectiveness of the Word of God, but because his faith began to fail, his ministry failed, and now he is quitting. This pastor has witnessed a half-dozen outstanding Christian leaders who suffered moral collapse and have been left on the shelf, their ministry and their testimony brought to an end. This is happening everywhere.

God is permitting this in order to separate the phony from the true. He says he will do this; the Word is very clear. There is a passage in Hebrews where we are definitely told that the things which can be shaken will be shaken. God is allowing these testings to reveal the genuine and to remove what can be shaken so that what cannot be shaken might remain. Therefore, evil days come. When they come into your own personal experience you will need to remember that the Word of God to you is to put on the whole armor of God, pray, and then stand. Perhaps you will realize that there is nothing else you can do, but that you must stand.

Not long ago, I once ran across a letter from a missionary out in the jungles of New Guinea, writing to his friends at home. He caught the very spirit of our Christian faith in these words:

Man, it is great to be in the thick of the fight, to draw the old devil's heaviest guns, to have

quit you like men, be strong," {1 Cor 16:13 KJV}. Do not surrender an inch of ground, even though you do.

"Well," someone says, "This is so negative, so defensive. I don't like to hear talk like this. It sounds like though Christians are to cover their heads and avoid all contact with the world, and try somehow to get through life, and on to heaven uncontaminated." That, of course, is exactly the twist that the devil gives this word. It is defensive action, but the amazing thing is that this kind of defensive action

support God, for he is out to attack and outwit him. Because God is truth, all that the devil can do is on the ground of untruth, of extremes, distortions, wrongness. Ultimately, because God is truth (and truth is the reflection of God) and God never changes, truth then must finally prevail. This has been the history of the world, has it not? It will be the continuing record of history from now on.

Perhaps Abraham Lincoln put it as well as it can be put in the famous quotation,

"It is possible to fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but it is impossible to fool all of the people all of the time."

Truth comes out. God is truth. Therefore, live with it long enough, stand on it long enough, and it will and reveal itself. This explains what we have referred to at times as "the phenomena of fashions in fashion." Anyone who has been a Christian for a considerable period of time learns that error comes in cycles, like clothing cycles. You may be out of style for awhile, but if you stay with the same style long enough, you will come back in. If you are standing on the truth of God, there will be times when it will be regarded with scorn by the world and laughed at and you will be made a mockery of. But if you follow these fools who think they must adjust to every sweeping current of the time and try to maintain what they call "respectability" at all times, you will find that as fast as you adjust, styles change and you are out of style. But if you stand fast on what God has declared unchangeable, you will find a strange phenomenon. The very truths which ten years ago were looked down upon, and laughed at, and scorned by the world, suddenly come into fashion again, and will be held up as the newest discovery of the brilliant intellect. Then you, who have been believing it right along, are right back in style again. This is because truth never changes.

The devil ultimately must be defeated if anyone will simply stand on what God has said. We might be a little sorry for the devil, for it is his cruel fate continually to be defeated by the very weapons he uses against God and his people. This is why it is so foolish to believe the lies of the devil.

I often think the devil is like the villain in the old Western melodramas. Remember how the plot always develops? It looks so threatening to the heroine, for the villain is always there twirling his mustache and rubbing his hands, thinking he has her in his power. But at the critical moment the hero arrives and suddenly changes. The villain is beaten by his own devices and he slinks off the stage muttering, "Foiled again!" That is the devil's fate when he attacks any Christian who is willing to stand.

The cross is the great example of this. The cross looked like the supreme achievement of the devil at the moment of victory when all the powers of darkness were howling with glee as they saw the Son of God and wounded, rejected and despised, hanging upon a cross, naked, before all the world. It looked like a triumph of darkness.

Jesus said it was: "This is your hour," he said, "and the power of darkness," {Luke 22:53b}. But it was the very moment when the devil lost. In the cross all that the devil had risked was defeated, beaten by the devil and all his angels were disarmed and openly displayed as defeated by the power of Jesus Christ. This is what God does all through life. The devil sends sickness, defeat, death, darkness, pain, suffering and all these things! -- and uses them to strengthen us and bless us, to teach us and enlarge us and fulfill us, to glorify God. This is the whole story.

Here is a quotation from a Christian man who has been an invalid all his life -- one of those lonely people who live in constant pain -- who does not know what it means to be able to use his physical

