

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 the need of a broken man for healing. In that, he revealed the heart of God, for certainly God is not interested in stained 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 midst of 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 motives, uncertain hopes, and untested programs. But when we come to the Bible we learn the truth. Here reality is set before us – the world as it really is. When we get down to the bare essentials of life, and strip off all the confusing illusion, we find it is exactly what the Bible records it to be. Here is where our perspectives are set straight, here is

where we get our value systems righted, and our dreams weighed and evaluated as to whether 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 much the worse for us. We shall only succeed in deceiving ourselves if we reject it. It is up to us to listen to the words 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. We Christians must continually reduce every argument we hear today to this simple consideration: “Am I to accept 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 today I would 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 life assumes.

Let us read Verses 10-13:

Finally, he 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 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}

It is very clear in that passage that Paul's view of the basic characteristic of life can be put in one word: *Struggle*. Life, he says, is a conflict, a combat, a continual wrestling. This is, of course, confirmed constantly by our experience. We should all like to think of life as romantic idealism, for most of us would like to think of ourselves as living in an idealistic world where everything goes right and we can spend our days in relaxation and enjoyment, with just enough work to keep us interested. This view is frequently embodied in some of the songs we sing:

"We'll build a sweet little nest,
Somewhere in the West,
And let the rest of the world go by."

Or, as it has been modernized,

"We'll build a nice little still,
Somewhere on the hill,
And let the rest of the world go dry."

Now it is not wrong for us to dream these dreams. These romantic ideals are a kind of racial memory, the vestigial remains of what was once God's intent for human life and, in God's good order and time, will be once again possible to humans.

But the Apostle Paul is not dealing with that kind of life. He is coming to grips with life as it really is now, and he says life is a struggle, a conflict, a combat against opposing forces. If we attempt to draw aside, to get away from the struggle, we continually find ourselves being jarred back into reality. Some unpleasant fact intrudes itself into our beautiful world and refuses to go away.

We all know how this is. We must get back to work, our vacation is ended, or the death of a loved one intrudes itself upon us with all its ghastly emp-

teness and loneliness, or we remember some pressing decision we must make, some threat to our prosperity or health, some disappointment in another person. We are constantly drawn back out of our dreams of ease and enjoyment to face the rough, hard realities of life.

The apostle also says that this is a fluctuating struggle. We must learn to stand, he says, "in the evil day," by 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 an actual day, sometimes it is a week, sometimes months. But thank God that all of life is not that way. We are not always under pressure, we are not always being confronted with overpowering circumstances which call for 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, were it not for the grace of God which continually operates to restrain the powers that are against us and to allow times of refreshment, recreation, enjoyment and blessing. The truly tragic thing about human life is that we can take these times of refreshment, blessing and glory and enjoy them without a single thought for the goodness of God which underlies them and makes them possible for us, without a word of gratefulness or thanksgiving to God that these should be. This is the note on which Paul opens the epistle to the Romans.

But, here, Paul says that these days, though they are not always the same in pressure, nevertheless constitute the general makeup of life. Life is an unending struggle, varying in intensity from time to time, but extending from the cradle to the grave. But he further goes on now to analyze and define for us the nature of this struggle.

We come now to that which is most important. For he says that the conflict is not against flesh and blood, i.e., it is not a human problem, it is not a struggle of man against man. It may be a struggle *within* man, but it is not *between* men. He assures us that it is not against flesh and blood. He puts it negatively first.

I wonder what we would answer if we were asked, "What is the thing that gives you the most difficulty in life; of what does the struggle of life

consist?" Many would feel that it is against flesh and blood. It is other human beings who bother us:

- There are, of course, the Communists. They are always causing difficulty. They can never let anything rest in this world. They are forever stirring up some kind of trouble somewhere.
- And then there are the Republicans or, if we are on the other side, the Democrats. They never let anything rest either. They are always making difficulties. In their bullheaded stubbornness and obstinacy they are continually refusing to see the light.
- There are those who oppose us in some of the newer political struggles of our day.
- And let us not forget the Internal Revenue Service. Certainly they are devils, if there ever were any.
- And the county tax department!
- And do not leave out your wife – and her family! Or your husband and his family.
- Then there are our neighbors, even our ancestors. It is our heredity which is at fault. It is because we are Scottish, or Irish, or Italian – our family has always been this way, we have always had a hot temper.

So the problem goes.

As we look at life in our superficial way we are tempted to say that our problem is other people, that we struggle against flesh and blood. But the apostle says that you cannot explain life adequately on that level. You must look further, you must look deeper than that. The problem is not against flesh and blood. Rather, there is set against the whole human race certain principalities and powers, world rulers of darkness, wicked spirits in high places. There is your problem, Paul says. Those are the enemies we are up against. And it is not just Christians who are opposed by these, but every man, everywhere. The whole race is opposed by the principalities and powers, the world rulers of

this present darkness. There is Paul's positive explanation of the struggle of life.

I hasten to say that this declaration will only be fully believed and understood by Christians. The world either distorts this to the point of ridiculousness, or it rejects it as unacceptable to the intelligent mind. This evening it is Halloween, and Halloween represents the distortion of this great doctrine which the apostle has propounded. Superstition has always taken this great revelation and has distorted it, twisted it, reduced it to a ridiculous pantheon of goblins, witches, spooks, and ghouls. Naturally that sort of thing is rejected by anyone of 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 has become 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 in the days when people took it seriously (and in places they still do) it represented a distorted view of the doctrine the apostle has revealed. Because it has suffered this distortion it is usually rejected by those who try to think seriously about life. The difficulty is that not only is the distortion rejected but the very truth behind it.

I am very well aware of the disdain, even contempt, with which this concept of the devil and his cohorts, this kingdom of darkness, these principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places, is received in many 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 root of all our problems?"

Recently I spent an evening in Berlin discussing with four or five intelligent churchmen this whole problem. They were men who knew the Bible intimately. Though we never once opened a Bible we spent the whole evening together discussing various passages from the Bible. I never referred to a single passage, but what they were aware of it and could quote it almost verbatim. Yet they rejected the idea of a devil. They said there was no personal devil. They could not believe this. At the end of the evening they admitted that, in their rejection of the devil, they also had no answer

to the conundrums which life was 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 story of a boxer who was engaged in a boxing match and was being badly beaten. Battered and bruised, he leaned over the ropes and said to his trainer, "Please throw in the towel! This guy is killing me!" The trainer said, "Oh no, he's not. He's not even hitting you. He hasn't laid a glove on you!" And the boxer said, "Well then, I wish 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 entrenched evil in human affairs?"

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

constantly breaking out in little fevers. But if we content ourselves, as physicians, with running around from place to place giving aspirin for the fever, and never once inquiring what the disease is, and what the cure and remedy is, we have wasted our time. Talk about relevancy! This is what is relevant – to listen to this analysis of what is wrong with the world, what its disease is, and what the cure is. That is what this passage so vividly 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. He says,

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 is before us, let alone what to pit 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! Listen to this bewildered cry from one of the leading statesmen of his day, U Thant, former Secretary General of the United Nations:

What element is lacking so that with all our skill and all our knowledge we still find ourselves in the dark valley of discord and enmity? What is it that inhibits us from going forward together to enjoy the fruits of human endeavor and to reap the harvest of human experience? Why is it that, for all our professed ideals, our hopes, and our skills, peace on earth is still a distant objective seen only dimly through the storms and turmoils of our present difficulties?

Here are the world's greatest leaders facing the dilemma of modern life, and all they can say is, "What is wrong? What is the unknown element behind this? We cannot understand this, we do not know what is going on, we cannot grasp these things. What is it that is missing?"

Talk about a relevant Scripture! This Scripture is the most relevant thing I know of today. For two thousand years it has been written down here. The Apostle Paul has given the answer to that baffled, bewildered cry for light from a modern statesman's heart. The world, Paul says, is in the grip of what he calls "world rulers of present darkness." What an amazing phrase that is! We shall look at it a little closer in subsequent messages. These world rulers of present darkness are headed by the devil, whom Scripture says is a fallen angel of malevolent power and cunning cleverness against whom Christians are called to wrestle daily. Now, that is not the claim of an isolated passage of the Bible. That is the teaching of the Bible from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, and especially in Genesis and Revelation.

The Lord Jesus himself put his finger on the whole problem when he said to certain men of his day, "You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies," {John 8:44}. In that most amazing analysis, the Lord stripped the devil of his disguises and revealed his true character – a liar and a murderer. What the devil does is because of who he is, just as what we do is precisely due to what we are. Because he is a liar and a murderer, the devil's work is to deceive and to destroy. There you have the explanation for all that has been going on in human history throughout the whole course of the record of man.

The devil has the ear of mankind. Scripture calls him, "the god of this world," {2 Cor 4:4}. The world listens to him, to everything he says. But the devil does not tell the world the truth but a lie, a very clever, a very beautiful, a very attractive lie which makes the world drool with desire. But the end of his lie is destruction, murder, death! – death in all its forms, not only ultimately the cessation of life, but also death in its incipient forms of restlessness, boredom, frustration, meaninglessness, and emptiness. Whom the devil cannot deceive he tries to destroy, and whom he cannot destroy he attempts to deceive. There is the working of the devil.

We are going to see much more about this and it is important that we do so, for this is the struggle of life. This is the explanation for it, and the only

adequate explanation for what is going on in our day which has ever been offered. The intelligent thing is to understand it and, understanding, to come to grips with it, and thus to be able to walk in victory – as Paul says, to be able to stand in the evil day.

"Well," you say, "This is all very depressing. I would rather not think about it."

So would I, but I have discovered that you cannot get away from it that way. There is only one way to handle this struggle and that is to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," {Eph 6:10 KJV}. That is the way of escape. There is no other.

This is a call to intelligent combat. It is a call to us to be men, to fight the good fight, to stand fast in the faith, to be strong in the Lord right in the midst of battle, in the midst of the world.

You can hear the trumpet call in this, can't you?

We are to take this seriously and to learn what life is all about. We must learn to recognize how these dark 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 joining committees or mustering some kind of physical struggle against these forces. Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, not fleshly, they are not of the body. Our weapons are mighty, through God, unto the pulling down of strongholds and bringing into captivity every thought – there is the arena: it is the realm of thought; it is the realm of ideas – bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. That is 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 known in the world!
- Do you think that is not exciting? That is the most exciting call which has ever gone out to men 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, prods 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 us, make them real.” In Christ’s name, Amen.

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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 leaders in our day who, in utter bafflement and bewilderment, are asking questions such as this:

- “Why can we not solve the basic problems of human life?”
- “Why can we not understand ourselves?”
- “Why is it that we are so ultimately helpless and powerless in the matter of changing human nature?”
- “Why is it that each generation has to fight the same battles fought by the previous ones?”

Paul’s answer to these questions is to go behind the merely human 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,” i.e., the kingdom of evil.

In the last message, we looked briefly at some of the reactions to this view of life. We saw there are some 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 Jesus Christ as an authority in these areas, and the testimony of millions of Christians through the centuries, as well as 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 does 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 explain 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 stark pessimism as they look out upon life. You can see this reflected in many of their writings. H. G. Wells, who in the last decade or so was an outstanding proponent of this theory that man was able to improve himself, sank deeper and deeper into a morass of pessimism as he watched the world scene until his last book, finished just before his death, revealed his utter despair by its title: *Mind 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 perhaps the angels, but they refuse to accept this

proposition of the existence of the devil. They say they can accept the existence of God and of heaven and the things that make for good, but they utterly reject the idea of a devil. This is a completely irrational position. Anyone who subscribes to that position has no logical basis for doing so, for the same revelation which tells us about God tells us about the devil. The same authorities (Christ and his apostles) who speak clearly about God, speak as clearly about the existence of the devil. Even the very language that we employ to describe the kingdom of God and its makeup reveals the existence also of another kingdom. 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 in that way, throwing out everything we do not like, we finally come down to a residue that is left, and what is left is simply what we happen to prefer. On the basis of that approach to the Scriptures, the only authority, really, is myself, what I think is right, what I choose to accept. Revelation is narrowed down to a tiny, circumscribed area which we personally, for some reason or another (mostly emotional) choose to accept. And then, 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 giving it an intelligent consideration. Our whole approach to this will find value only as men and women take seriously the presentation of Scripture in this respect. No other explanation comes to grips with the problems of life as this one does. No other explanation of the evil of the world takes in all the aspects of human life. I do not hesitate to make a statement as strong as that. Anything else is superficial, if not artificial. Anything less 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, these wicked spirits in high places whom Paul says lie behind this insoluble problem of human evil. Notice that the apostle implies that the only ones who can successfully battle against these dark

forces are Christians. “For we are not contending against flesh and blood...” Who are the “we”? Surely this is not man in general, but these are 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. Now 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 the challenge that was presented to him as he was casting out demons. This activity of our Lord is an area of his ministry which is continually questioned by those who choose to approach the Scriptures intellectually. They do not like this business of casting out demons, and explain it in various ways. We will say more about that later on in this series, but in the biblical account certain ones said of him that his casting out demons resulted 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, for that is exactly what hell is – a wasted life, a garbage dump.) The god who reigned over this garbage heap was the devil, and because a garbage pile always attracts flies, they called Beelzebub the lord of the flies. (There is a modern novel written on that theme.) So certain people were accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the authority of Beelzebub, the lord of the flies. Jesus said, “No, you are quite wrong, and the reason you are wrong is that if that be true, then obviously Satan’s kingdom would be divided against itself,” {cf, Luke 11:18}. His argument is simply this: Satan never does that. Satan never fights against himself. Satan is too clever, too cunning, far too astute ever to divide his forces in that way, for if he did, he knows that his kingdom would fall. Therefore, Jesus is suggesting that any man who is under the control of Satan has no possibility of deliverance apart from an outside, intervening force. Notice how he puts that in Verse 21 of Luke 11:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; {Luke 11:21 RSV}

Who is the strong man? Satan.

What is the palace? The world.

Who are the goods? Mankind, everywhere.

In the three verses which present this figure of the strong man there are three great principles which emerge:

1. The first, found in Verse 21, is that man, alone, against Satan, is powerless and hopeless. This is the unchanging position of Scripture. John says, "We [Christians] know we are of God, but the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one," {cf, 1 Jn 5:19}. This is the position of the Bible, that the world has fallen under the control of Satan. Not the world of trees and mountains and lakes and seas; that is God's world. We sing, "This is my Father's world," and we are right, but the world of organized human society has fallen under the control of Satan, and there is no possibility of an escape apart from an intervention from without. For, as Jesus says, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace;" {Luke 11:21 RSV}. There can be no threat from within to Satan's control.

That is very revealing, for there our Lord is putting his finger on the reason for the continual failure of the usual methods human beings employ to correct evils and wrongs, the usual methods of reform. They fail because they do not come to grips with the essential problem. All our methods of trying to correct the evils we see in human life are simply rearrangements of the difficulties. We succeed only in stirring them around a bit until they take a different form. But our methods never can solve the central problem of evil because they do not come to grips with the power of Satan.

Man under Satan is not a happy being. He is forever restless and peevish and discontent. That is why the world continually reflects those qualities. Man sees the problems his kind of

existence creates, and he is always trying to remedy them. He keeps busy trying to solve these problems which break out, these difficulties which are reported in our newspapers, but all his efforts achieve is merely to shift the pattern till they take a different form. Then man pats himself on the back and proudly says, "We have solved this problem!" But he has only moved to a different symptom of the same disease. As C. S. Lewis so aptly put it, "No clever arrangement of bad eggs will make a good omelet." When the full cycle of problems is run through, it begins again, and we say, "History repeats itself."

What are the usual methods of human reform? You can list them easily. Almost invariably they are legislation, education, and an improved environment. Every problem we face is usually approached by using one or a combination of these three.

- Legislation is law, it is merely the control of the outward man. It has nothing to do with and cannot do anything to the inward man. It does not change the basic nature of man, but merely restricts him so that he does not manifest certain qualities under certain conditions.
- Education is one of the worst things we can do to a deranged personality, to a twisted mind. The position of Scripture is that all of us are born with twisted mind. Some of us are more twisted than others – they are the ones that we call "twisted minds!" To educate a twisted mind is but to make it more clever in its wickedness, and this is what results. The educated criminal is a far more clever, more subtle more difficult criminal to catch. The educated mind, approaching human personality problems, only throws over them a very clever patina of knowledge which serves to cover over the real difficulties. Education does not basically change man, it makes him more clever.
- Improved environment does not change him, either. I do not know how long is going to take human society to learn that when you take a man and lift him out of

the slums and put him into a nicer environment you do absolutely nothing to the man himself. In a little while, given time, he will make that new environment a slum as well.

These are the usual approaches to reform. I do not mean to suggest we scuttle them. They all have certain values, but they do not come to grips with the basic problem. This is why, after a lifetime of trying to change man with these methods, those who are knowledgeable thinkers in this area always end up with a terrible black outlook of pessimism.

Listen to these words by the late Bertrand Russell, the atheistic philosopher:

The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal that few can hope to reach and where none can tarry long. One by one as they march our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Brief and powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls, pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. For man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gates of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.

Those eloquent words catalog the sheer despair into which man falls when he is far from God. There is a growing sense of despair everywhere you turn today. It is the unconscious realization of man's helplessness under Satan.

2. Now look at Verse 22 of our Lord's words in Luke 11:

But when one stronger than he assails him and overtakes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoil. {Luke 11:22 RSV}

Who is this stronger one? It is Jesus.

He is speaking of himself. He says when a strong man, fully armed, guards his palace, his

goods are at peace, and nothing can be done about it, least of all by the goods themselves. But when one who is stronger comes, he breaks the power of that strong man, and frees his slaves. Here he declares a second principle – Christ's victory, made personal to an individual by faith, breaks the power of Satan. Here is the "good news" of the gospel. We sing it:

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

In the mystery of the cross of Jesus, and in the power of his resurrection, applied by faith, we men and women who have been born into a society which is under the control of the satanic mind discover that the force which ruins us is broken, and its power to grip us is loosed, and we are set free. There is no other power which can do it. That is why this Christian gospel is such an exclusive thing. That is why Christians are perfectly justified when they say there is no other answer to the problems of man; there is no other power which can touch the basic problem of human life. There is only one "stronger one" who has come into the world and has come to grips with the power of this dark spirit and broken his power over human life.

How many there are throughout the Christian centuries, and also here this morning, who can testify to this. 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. The writers of Scripture make that clear. They say, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of them who believe not," {cf, 2 Cor 4:4}. That great document on human liberty, the Epistle to the Romans, opens on that level. Paul suggests that the greatest antagonism against the gospel does not come from the uneducated but from the educated, those who, "thinking themselves to be wise, become fools" {cf, Rom 1:22}, and change the glory of God into a lie. The mind becomes

blinded and the result is darkened minds, which are outwardly cultured 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 undo the works of the devil,” {cf, 1 Jn 3:8}. There is no adequate explanation of his coming, apart from that. Paul says he came “to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of his love.” Paul himself was chosen as apostle to the Gentiles and, in that dramatic conversion experience on the Damascus road, he said to the Lord whom he saw in the glory, “What will you have me to do?” {cf, Acts 9:6 KJV}. Jesus replied, “Stand upon your feet, for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles, to open their eyes and to turn men 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 of life, such as applying it to social concerns, we only reveal how far we have mistaken its purpose. The gospel will 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 and glory of his resurrection. When a man or woman believes that, and commits himself upon that basis, he discovers that the whole thing becomes practical and actual in his experience. This is what we call conversion. That is the beginning of the battle.

Do you Christians ever think of yourselves this way? You say, “My sins have been forgiven,” but do you ever 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? – who “have forgotten that they were once delivered from their sins,” {cf, 2 Pet 1:9}.

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

He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. {Luke 11:23 RSV}

He is saying here that no neutral ground is possible, and no mere profession is sufficient. There is no third group possible. Jesus said, “He who is not with me is against me.” There are always those who say,

“I understand something of the gospel, and I must confess that I believe there is much of value in the Christian faith. I am a friend of Christianity. I believe that it has a great moral impact to bring into our world, but I do not care to go so far as personally ‘receiving Christ.’ I think I will remain neutral.”

Jesus says this is impossible. There is no neutrality. “He who is not with me is against me.” He who has not received the deliverance wrought is still under the bondage and control of the dark powers of Satan. There are no exceptions.

This is why Christ is the crisis of history. He spoke of himself that way – as the divider of men. He is here, dividing this congregation. In this audience, as he looks at it, there are only two groups. There are those who are with him, wholly with him because they are of him – they have received him, they know him, they love him, they have partaken of his life – and there are those who are against him. “He who is not with me is against me.”

But neither can one say, as some are tempted to say, “Well, if this is the case, then I want to be a Christian, but I do not know about all this inward control. I am willing to go along with the outward forms. I’m willing to join the church. I’m willing to give my name to this, to join the Christian crowd, and to do all the right things, but inwardly I still believe in directing my own life and running my own affairs.” Jesus says you cannot 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, making 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 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, wholesome 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 situation. Man is not free. He is not able to carry out his own decisions except in a limited area, and it is his illusion of 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. But if Christ has set you free, then to partake of communion is a heartwarming experience. It is to remember anew that deliverance which has come and has broken the chains of Satan, destroyed the binding power, torn away the darkness and let in the light, thus making it possible for us to be men and women as God intended men and women to be.

If you have not known that deliverance you can know it now. Perhaps you have had to say, "If what you have 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 anything 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 reason why human life can never progress beyond what it has in these centuries of struggle and darkness, then I no 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,

Beginning the Battle

and know something of the reality of this delivering power in our life, we pray that we may come to this Table with deeply grateful hearts. We ask that we may never forget that we have been set free, that Jesus

did this for us when we could do nothing for ourselves. May we celebrate this feast of love with a heart filled with love for him who loved us and gave himself for us. We pray in his name, Amen.

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The Strategy of Satan

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series we are seeking to understand the evident bafflement of the world leaders today who are trying to grasp and solve the problems of our human situation. We have already noted that the clearest thinkers among the world leaders acknowledge abject defeat when it comes to really grasping the problems we face. The statesmen of the world have long ago abandoned any attempt to formulate long-range policies. They are content now to grapple with each problem as it arises. The policy of the nations is to play each situation by ear and to do the best they can under the circumstances, for the problems of the world have long since grown so complex and so difficult that no one can anticipate what is coming.

Further, we have seen that we will never understand and comprehend what is going on in our world for these many centuries until we accept the biblical diagnosis of life. Paul puts this diagnosis very plainly in Ephesians 6:

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 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 6:12-13 RSV}

We have noted already that our experience confirms the suggestion of this passage – that life is basically a struggle. Life never conforms to the rosy idealism of our dreams, or to the romanticism of our songs. We saw, further, that the explanation of this struggle lies deeper than we ordinarily think. The common view of our struggle in the present world situation, as in every situation of the past, has been that we are engaged in conflict against flesh and blood, against other men and women.

But Paul says the battle is not against flesh and blood; it lies deeper than that. The basic problem is that this is a battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and that man himself is the battlefield. The battle is visible not only in the wars, revolutions, and crime waves which oppress us, and fill our newspapers, but it is also seen in the inner tensions and fears of individual lives, in the neurotic problems and mental illnesses which afflict us today, in family fights and church struggles. It is even visible in nature, where all of life competes in a ruthless, deadly struggle to survive.

We saw that the whole race, according to this passage, has fallen under the control of satanic forces, whom Paul calls, “the world rulers of this present darkness” – a most significant phrase. Jesus confirms this in his figurative description of Satan as the strong man who, armed, rules his own palace and keeps his goods in peace. The picture of the Bible from beginning to end is that all human beings, without exception, regardless 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 completely 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 that “stronger one,” Jesus himself, who came, as John tells us, “to destroy the works of the devil” {1 Jn 3:8b}, 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 this (i.e., those who believe, for Scripture always addresses itself to belief), are set free to live in the freedom and liberty of the children of God.

But they are not set free to live unto themselves. That is a common misconception of Christianity. Many believe that Christ has come into their lives by means of the cross, and the things which have bound them and blasted them and ruined them have been stricken away, and they have been set free. All too frequently they feel 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 battle. 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 others are set free. Thus there comes this call to us in this closing chapter in the letter to the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, {Eph 6:10-11a RSV}

We must now give closer attention to the actual conduct of this battle.

If this conflict is the basic problem of human life, how much devolves upon us in conducting or fighting this battle? How do you do this?

Paul's answer is in one phrase: "Put on the whole armor of God." Full provision has been made that you might win in this battle.

This is the amazing thing we must learn. It is something we seldom take seriously. God has made full provision for us to fight these great and powerful forces which hold the world in their grip.

But it would be a mistake to start there, to begin with the armor of God. If we start there, we find that this figure of armor strikes people with a note of unreality. It does not sound real. It is like a game they are playing, and there is no sense of the importance of this. We must end up talking about the armor of God, as we shall in this series, but we cannot start there.

We must start by seeing what it is we are opposed by. Armor is made for defense, and we will see no value in these pieces designed for our defense until we see what we are defending against. Let us realize something of the cleverness, the cunning wiliness of the forces against which we are battling, and we will begin to appreciate the armor with which we have been provided. Therefore we shall start there.

Today, I want primarily to look at this phrase of Paul's, "the wiles of the devil." The first step for any soldier in training is to be introduced to the strategy and weapons which the enemy will use against him. The devil is a very cunning and wily strategist. Martin Luther is quite right when he writes,

For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
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 one of the great and glorious kings of Israel was defeated at one time or another by the devil. The wisest and greatest of men are absolutely helpless and futile in attempting to outwit the devil by themselves. Yet, as we have already seen, the Bible indicates that it is quite possible to walk in victory.

James says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you," {Jas 4:7b}. Think of that! This clever, cunning strategist who has held the world for centuries in defeat, whom no man is able to outmaneuver, will flee from you when you learn, like Paul, not to be ignorant of his devices.

Now the questions we must ask are, "What is the general strategy of the devil? How does he plan to do this? How is it that he keeps the world in such bondage and such powerlessness?"

The only one in all history who has ever consistently and unbrokenly defeated the devil, not only in his life but also in his death, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He put his finger squarely upon the strategy and the tactics of Satan when he said, "The devil is a liar and a murderer from the beginning," {cf, John 8:44}. The strategy of the devil is to murder. The tactic by which he accomplishes this is to lie. If we consider these phrases carefully we will see how accurate they are.

How does the devil plan to oppose the work of God in the world? Well, by murdering, by destroying. One of the names given to the devil in the book of the Revelation is *Apollyon*, the "Destroyer." What does "destroy" mean? It is to create chaos, to lay waste, to ruin, to make desolate. There you have the explanation for the whole tragic story of human history: A destroyer is at

work among men. Our God is a God of beauty, harmony, order, and perfection, of love, of light, and grace. There is enough evidence left in the world of nature, including our own being, and in the world of ideas, to see this marvelous symmetry, beauty, and perfection of God. God is a God of harmony and order. The world was created as orderly, and then along with it.

But into this scene a destroyer came. It is his delight to smash, to mangle, to twist, to mutilate, to disfigure, to darken and blast in every way he can. It does not make any difference whether it is bodies or souls, flesh or ideas, matter or spirit, the aim of the devil is exactly the same in every case: It is to distort, to blast, to twist, to destroy. That is why the devil can never offer anything positive to human life. He can make nothing. He has never made anything and he never can make anything. All he can do is destroy what God has made. His power is totally negative, completely destructive in every way.

What are the tactics the devil employs to accomplish this dastardly destructiveness which is so abundantly confirmed as you look around at life and read your newspaper and review the story of human history? How does he do it? Well, by deceiving, by lying, by distorting, by counterfeiting, by play-acting and masquerading, by illusion and fantasy. This is what Paul calls “the wiles of the devil.” Read through the Bible and see how many times the work of the devil is referred to in that manner – the snares, the traps of the devil, the illusions, the stratagems, the wiles. We shall content ourselves now with a general survey of these wiles. In our next message we hope to take a much closer look at the actual tactics the devil is employing in your life and mine to defeat us and keep us in weakness, to ruin and lay waste our lives.

The Bible makes clear that the tactics of the devil fall into two major divisions. He attacks the human race both directly and indirectly. He is capable of a direct confrontation with human beings, and an indirect approach. And through these two avenues he maintains his world-wide control over the race of men. The Bible indicates that there are fallen hosts of angels called *demons*, whom Paul calls here “the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.” Now “heavenly places” does not mean far off in heaven somewhere. “Heavenly” means “the realm of the in-

visibilities,” i.e., the invisible realities of life. The devil and his hosts are not visible. That is what he is saying. The devil’s activity is in this realm of the invisible reality of life, the heavenly places where God works, as well as 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 and beauty and power. There is a brief reference to the fall of this great angel, whose name was Lucifer, and who was lifted up by pride. Pride is always the mark of the devil. Lifted up by pride, he chose to rival God and, in doing so, he fell from his station of might and glory and beauty and became the devil. He drew a third of the angels with him, and these constitute the principalities and powers, the organized kingdom of darkness, as opposed to the kingdom of God. It is through these hosts of wicked spirits that Satan is able to make a direct assault upon human life.

This direct assault covers what the Bible refers to as “demon possession,” the outright control of human personality by the power of a wicked spirit. It also extends to such activities as soothsaying, occultism, spiritism (or spiritualism), and related black magic arts such as astrology, horoscopes, voodooism, fortune telling, etc.

A word of warning is in order right here. There is no question that there is much chicanery and deception in this whole field of black magic. There are charlatans at work who make their living off the superstitious fears of people and who engage in deceptive tricks which give the impression they are genuinely dealing with the occult. It is very difficult to tell the difference between the genuine and the false in this field. Great care must be displayed by anyone attempting to investigate it, because there is very much smoke, but the Bible makes clear there is considerable fire as well. There is truth behind this black magic.

The Bible consistently warns against dabbling in these matters. Under the Law, the people of Israel were strictly forbidden to have anything to do with wizards “that peep and mutter” {cf, Isa 8:19}, and those who try to make contact with the dead, or those who deal with the world of the occult. This prohibition was largely because any investigation into this realm immediately lays one open to powers beyond men’s ken and makes possible control and influence beyond the will of the individual in-

vestigating. This is dangerous ground. It opens the way, oftentimes, to outright demon possession.

As to this subject of demon possession, I am very well aware there are many people who raise their eyebrows in incredulity whenever this subject is mentioned. They say, "Surely you don't believe in that kind of stuff anymore. In this 20th century day you're not telling us there are such things as demons! After all, the days in which the Bible were written were primitive times. People believed in that type of thing then, but we're much better informed now. What was once called demon possession we now know to be only mental illness. We can treat it with drugs and other therapy."

What is our reply to that? Simply this:

1. First, the Bible itself is very careful to distinguish between mental illness and demon possession. The Bible is not as primitive a book as many people imagine. It makes a very careful distinction between these two things. The writers of the Scriptures were certainly aware of this distinction. One of them, Luke, was a physician himself and was certainly acquainted with the distinctions between diseases and mental illnesses, as well as demon possession. In Matthew 4:24 a careful distinction is made between those who were afflicted by diseases, those who were demon possessed, and those who were lunatic or mentally ill. Dr. Luke refers to the same thing in Luke 4:40-41.
 2. Second, it is important to notice that the biblical cases of demon possession do not conform to the clinical pattern of any known mental disease. There are diseases of the body and there are diseases of the mind. Diseases of the mind, like those of the body, present standard clinical patterns which can readily be recognized. But when you examine carefully the biblical accounts of demon possession you find these do not fit any of the standard patterns of mental diseases. They are not the same thing; they do not conform.
 - In the first place, there is always a debasing element in the biblical cases of demon possession, an uncleanness, a moral debasement. Also in the biblical accounts of demon possession there was an immediate recognition by the demon within of the character and identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ approached these demons, many times they would call out and say, "What have we to do with you, thou Son of God?" {cf, Matt 8:29, Luke 8:28}. They called him by name and used titles for him which the victims they were possessing were not at all acquainted with. There is so often this immediate and strange recognition of the authority of Jesus Christ.
 3. A third factor is that Jesus himself invariably described these cases as demon possession. This is what he said 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 for that. It is simply a recognition that Jesus was accommodating himself to the thought of the men of his day. 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 matter, "If it were not so I would have told you," {John 14:2}. He came to re-
- Further, there is always the presence of a totally distinct and different personality involved. In some cases many personalities were involved, as in the incident when Jesus asked the name of the demon and the reply was, "Our name is legion. There are many of us here," {cf, Mark 5:9}.
 - Finally, there is the ability on the 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 some kind of schizophrenia, then how do you explain these demons leaving the man and entering the swine, causing them to rush down the hillside and drown themselves in the sea? These cases simply do not conform to any clinical pattern of known mental disease.

veal the truth about things, and in other areas he was constantly correcting the misconceptions they held.

4. 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 wherever Christian teaching spreads, the direct assault of these evil powers upon human life is kept in abeyance. Even secular teaching which is based upon the Bible and Christian values and is moral and uplifting has an ability to keep these manifestations under control. But when education becomes purely secular and denies the Bible and denies God then, even though men and women reject superstition and profess a degree of sophistication about these matters, this is not enough to keep these powers at bay. As our world grows more and more godless and more and more secularized, we will find an increasing tide of demonic manifestation creeping into our culture and insinuating itself into our civilized life. There is no power in man to withhold these or to stand against them.

I was interested to read in the newspaper recently that the defense attorneys for a young man in Nebraska who killed three people and wounded another in a bank robbery are suggesting, as one of their maneuvers in trying to defend him, that perhaps he was demon possessed.

I wish to say one more thing before I leave this description of direct demonic attack. I want to recognize this briefly and then move on to that which is more important to us. When Christians are confronted with what they suspect is demon possession, the one thing we are told to do in order to help such people is to pray. These cases of demon possession, Jesus said, yield themselves to concerted and persistent prayer. Prayer is the recommended therapy in any case of this type. Let us give ourselves to prayer and nothing more.

I feel there is altogether too much concern among Christians about this matter of demon possession. That sounds almost as though I am contradicting what I have said before, but I am merely trying to balance it. I know certain Christians who feel they must *bind* Satan before they do anything.

When they go into a room to have a meeting they will pray to bind the powers of darkness before they hold the meeting in the room. I know others who ascribe every common problem of human life to some manifestation of demon activity.

The New Testament gives absolutely no warrant for this type of approach. The apostles very seldom mention the direct attack of Satan against human beings. There are a few instances of it, but after our Lord physically left the world there seems to be a diminution, a dying down of the evidences of demonic activity. These dark powers were stirred up by his presence on earth, but to a degree this faded away after he left, so that in the epistles you do not get the same concern for demonic activity as you do in the Gospels. There is much about Satan in the letters of Paul, but there is little of the direct attack of satanic forces. Nowhere do you read that Christians are instructed to go around binding the powers of darkness before they enter a room, or to ascribe all the common problems of life to demonic activities. That idea is not in the New Testament. Therefore, I say 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 why they are called the *wiles* of the devil. Wili-ness 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, difficult to detect.

This is what we shall concern ourselves with in our next message. We need to examine this more thoroughly, for the major attack of the devil and his powers against human life is not by direct means but indirect – by 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 through 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] **made alive, 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], **the 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 all the children of disobedience.” Further, he says,

Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh [there is the flesh], **following the desires of body and mind** [“Oh,” 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* stimuli.], **and so** [because we were doing these things, following the course of this world under the direction of the prince of the power of the air, and obeying the impulses of the body and the mind] **we were by nature 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 life. It is a term which describes the urge to self-centeredness within us, that distortion of human nature which makes us 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 these things. 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 to go to school. We were all born with “the flesh,” and it is the presence of this which makes us sinners. James calls this the wisdom which is from beneath, which is “earthly, sensual, devilish,” {Jas 3:15 KJV}. Devilish! It is 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 it is a distortion of the beauty which God intended man to have. Romans 3:23 says, as Phillips translates it, “Everyone has sinned and has missed the beauty of God’s plan.”

- *The world*, on the other hand, is the corporate expression of all the flesh-centered individuals who make up the human race. Since the flesh is in every one of them – acting satanic, devilish, sensual, earthy – therefore the total combined expression of such beings constitutes the world, and determines the philosophy of the world. It is that tremendous pressure of the majority upon the minority to conform, adjust, keep in step, not to digress or to be different. When the Bible addresses itself to Christians it says, “Be not conformed to this world” {Rom 12:2a KJV}, i.e., “Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.” Why? Because the world is flesh-centered, flesh-governed, and as Jesus said to Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh remains flesh. It needs a new birth in order to be changed. It must be born of the Spirit,” {cf, John 3:6}. So this is the world – that human society which insists on satanic value judgments, and is guided by satanic pride and philosophy. It is totally unaware of it, yet nevertheless it is under the control of satanic philosophy.

Next time we shall examine how this affects us. But remember this: The aim, the goal, which Satan

has in all this clever stratagem by which he has kept the human race in bondage through these hundreds of centuries is to destroy, to ruin, to make waste. That is what he is aiming at with you; that is what he is aiming at with me.

Only yesterday I talked with a man concerning a young man who had been raised in this church, one of our own boys. Though he is only twenty-one years of age, already, because of the rebellious determination of his heart to reject the truth of God and to live his own life, he is a mental and physical wreck. Why? Because he has turned aside from the truth and he has followed the philosophy of Satan. Satan is accomplishing his aims, destroying this life which God loves, wrecking, mutilating, laying it waste, ruining it.

That is what he is attempting to do with us all. Against this we who are Christians are called to battle, not only for ourselves, as we will see in this account, but also for others as well.

Battling against these forces of darkness is what makes human life possible on this earth at all. If Christians, who are the salt of the earth, are not giving themselves to an intelligent battle with Satan and satanic forces, fighting along these lines which Paul suggests – being “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might” – it would be absolutely impossible for human life to exist on this planet. If this were not going on, life on earth would be one horrible, unending hell. It is the presence of Christians, and those who are affected by their testimony and by their teachings, and the spread of the gospel throughout the world which makes possible those

moments of enjoyment of life which even the non-Christian is able to know.

That puts things in right perspective, doesn't it? There you see life as it really is. What a mighty call this is then!

“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,” in these terrible and glorious days in which we live! Many are falling by the way. Many are slipping back under the control of satanic ideas and satanic philosophy and are denying the essential truth of God. But these are the days when, more than ever before, we are to respond to this mighty call: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that you will awaken our hearts and minds, and tear away the delusive veils by which we have allowed ourselves to be defeated and weakened and rendered powerless and ineffective in this great battle. Help us to understand that we would have no possibility of fighting in this battle were it not for the delivering work of the Lord Jesus who, as the stronger one, has come to bind the power of darkness. We thank you that the victory is already won. Thank you for the privilege we have of moving over into the kingdom of God, and for the chance to stop fighting a battle already lost and to begin to fight a battle already won. In Christ's name, Amen.

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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 give serious consideration to the only adequate explanation for the human dilemma ever offered. That explanation is put 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 problems without dealing with this evil power which is behind them, these principalities and powers that Paul speaks of, which he calls, "the world rulers of this present darkness."

Some time ago I heard of a mental hospital which had devised an unusual test to determine when their patients were ready to go back into the world. They brought any candidates for return into a room where a water tap was pouring water out over the floor. They handed the patient a mop and told him to mop up the water. If the patient had sense enough to turn off the tap before mopping up the water, he was ready to go back. But if, as in the case of many, he took the mop and started

mopping up the water with the tap still flowing, they knew more treatment was needed.

We laugh at that, but I am afraid we are laughing at ourselves, because that is what many people are doing. Each Christian, facing the personal world in which he lives, is given the mop of truth and told to use it. But we can only help in that world if we have enough intelligence to conquer first the evil which is pouring into our own hearts from these present rulers of world darkness. That is exactly what the apostle is urging. We can be of no possible help in the solutions of world problems as long as we remain part of the problems. Therefore, this whole passage is designed to awaken us and to call our attention to the need for understanding the nature of our problem.

We have already seen that the devil attacks humanity in two ways – directly and indirectly.

- The direct attack, involving an obvious and outright control of human personality, though it is the most dramatic, is the least dangerous of the forms the devil employs. There are relatively few in this world who are demon-possessed, though there are some.
- But it is through the indirect attack that most of the damage is done. As we saw, it is largely through the channels of the world and the flesh that the devil makes his attack upon human life.
- *The world* is human society, blindly and universally accepting false values, shallow concepts and insights and deluded ideas of reality,

as well as almost desperately insisting upon conformity to those standards and insights.

- *The flesh* is that inward urge within us toward total independence, toward being our own little gods and running our worlds to suit ourselves. It is that continual drift within us toward self-centeredness and selfishness.

You can see immediately how universal this is. Is there anyone who has never had this problem? Obviously this is the main battlefield where we fight against these world rulers of present darkness. This is not something 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 that and see 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 run 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.

It is true the devil can never totally defeat a Christian. Those who are genuinely the Lord's, who are born again, who have come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, are delivered from total defeat. We do not hesitate to emphasize that. The devil can never get us back into the position of unconscious control which he once exercised over us, as he does over the rest of the world. But he can demoralize the Christian. He can frighten us, he can make us miserable, he can defeat us in many ways. He can make us weak and therefore barren and unfruitful in the things of God. It is quite possible to be more unhappy and miserable as a Christian than you ever were before you became a Christian, at least for periods of time.

The devil is especially interested in defeating Christians. After all, the unredeemed worldling is

not problem to the devil. As Jesus put it, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace," {Luke 11:21 RSV}. All the quite sincere but rather pathetic efforts of worldlings to solve the problems of their lives through legislation, education and a change of environment do not bother the devil in the least. He is quite content to let them go on rearranging the pieces of the puzzle without ever solving it. But the presence of every Christian in this world bothers the devil greatly. Why? Well, because each Christian is a potential threat to the solidarity of the devil's kingdom, to his rule over the rest of mankind.

If the devil lets the Spirit of God have his way, any individual Christian, without exception, would be a powerful force to destroy the devil's kingdom of darkness. Each Christian would be to others a door of escape out of the unconscious control of these world rulers of present darkness. Every Christian would be a corridor of liberty, a center of light, dispelling the darkness and ignorance of the world around him. The devil cannot let that happen if he can help it. So he attacks the Christian, especially and particularly. He marshals all his forces against you, coming sometimes as a "roaring lion" {1 Pet 5:8}, in some catastrophic circumstance which seems to knock you off your feet so that you cannot stand, or coming as an "angel of light" {2 Cor 11:14}, alluring appealing, offering something that seems to be just the right thing for the right moment. The devil takes over in direct control of human life whenever he can. Thus we find men like Hitler arising on the world scene from time to time, demonic men, motivated by strange and unexplainable passions. Sometimes he assails us through the world, with its monstrous pressure to keep in line, not to be different, and its ostracism of those who attempt to swim against the stream. But most often the devil comes in disguise, through the channel of *the flesh* – our inner selves – with silken, subtle, suggestive wiles. That particularly is what the apostle is warning against – the wiles of the devil.

We must now take a closer look at this flesh within us:

According to the Bible, *the flesh*, in this symbolic sense, is identified with the body which ultimately dies. In Romans 8 the apostle says, "The body is dead because of sin," {Rom 8:10}. We would say, "The body is dying because of sin," but the apostle looks on to the end and says that it is as

good as dead already. We all agree with this. We all must die, we say. In this temporary state before the resurrection, the body is the seat of sin, or *the flesh* – this evil principle of self-centeredness in each of us. Therefore, *the flesh* is going to be with us for life. We shall never escape it until that wonderful day of the resurrection from the dead. The body is 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 locate it in the body. The relationship between the body, soul and spirit is beyond our comprehension. But because they are so inextricably tied together, *the flesh*, linked to the body, touches the whole man. It is important to see this. This means that the devil can influence us, in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit. He has access to 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 mind, our feelings, and our deeds, through our intelligence, our emotions, and our will – that which we choose to do 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 our reason as the greatest gift God has given to man – and not without justification. Obviously it is our ability to reason, to hold abstract concepts and relate them one to another, which makes us superior to the animals and separates us from the rest of the lower creation. We take pride in this ability to reason. It is through appeal to 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 true that basically we are 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, if you like. It is through these that the devil makes his appeal to us by playing on our fears. We are so afraid we will miss 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 essentially sensuous, i.e., it is designed by God to respond to stimuli. We learn early in life that there are certain stimuli which are very pleasurable, while others are unpleasant. We learn to seek the pleasant and reject or avoid the unpleasant. So the body is constantly seeking after that which thrills or excites or pleases in some way, and 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 when she saw that the fruit was good for food, i.e., it offered the pleasant sensation of eating (the appeal to the body), and it was a delight to the eyes, i.e., it awakened within her a sense of beauty (the appeal to the emotions), and when 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 moved – 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 clearly the book which understands man. It helps us to understand the way we are, and when we apply it to life we see that it is exactly right, that it describes exactly the way we operate. It is important to notice that both of the forces outside man, which work upon man – God and the devil – move him through these channels:

- The emotions, i.e., the heart;
- The mind, i.e., the intelligence; and
- The will, the power to choose.

“Well,” you say, “if that is the case, if the devil and God both move us by the same channels, then

what is the difference?" The difference is simply this: The devil moves to create an imbalance, an eccentricity, toward extremism. The devil is the original extremist. All extreme groups please take note of that! God moves, however, toward balance, harmony, and beauty. The difference is not how they work, but the direction in 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 investigate, every advent of history. The gospel is not content simply to adjust a few problems in man. That is what we are 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 here, or that small problem there, he has touched only a part of our life, and the rest will remain out of balance, 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 there is in 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 the insights he exhibits. They say, "Never man spake like this man," {John 7:46 KJV}. But he is not all intellect, making his appeal to the philosopher alone. As you read the record you see that he is also warmly human. He is constantly expressing compassion and human concern. He is easy to live with. Further, he manifests both intelligence and emotionalism in deeds. He is not content merely to feel certain things or to talk about certain great truths, but these find their ultimate expression in practical deeds, in actions, in unforgettable, undeniable events such as the cross and the resurrection. His life is thus grounded in history. That is the glory of our faith.

You can see this appeal to the whole of man in the Scriptures. What a marvelous sanity of balance is maintained in the Bible! The whole man is ministered to – the needs of the soul, the body, and the

spirit – all kept in a delicate equilibrium, with nothing out of balance. Everything is in harmony – the mind, the heart and the will are all moved together. When God gets hold of a man he takes the whole man and begins to touch every part of his life. That is the gospel. Anything less is an incomplete message, a fragment of the gospel.

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

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

What is that? Well, that is the mind engaged. When I think about the cross, when I give intelligent consideration to what it means, when I think of all that was involved in that supreme hour when Jesus hung between heaven and earth, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died – my intelligence is captured. I see there are deep and marvelous things about this event. And then what? Well, it moves my emotions:

My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

I am moved, my emotions are immediately involved. I have learned that when people talk about the truth of the Word, and it does not move them emotionally, they have not really understood the truth. Truth is designed to reach the heart, to move it, and to involve it. As you go on in this song you see how marvelously the emotions are involved:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small...

Here is a sense of the grandeur of the work of the cross, the extent of it, and the glory of it.

Love so amazing, so divine...

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

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The whole man is totally engaged. That is the way God works!

But what does the devil do? Well, he tries to create imbalance – to build up one element of man’s nature at the expense of others, to push us to an extreme, to turn us into persons who are characterized by only one thing. Instead of whole persons, we are grotesque caricatures of men. There are many who take pride in emphasizing one part of their being above everything else. There are the intellectuals – we call them “eggheads,” “brains.” They say there is nothing important in life but the mind, the ability to reason, and they give themselves to the development of this area of their life. As a result they are so absent-minded, so impractical, you can hardly live with them! Because they are out of balance we call them eccentric.

Then there are the emotional people, the ones who say, “Oh, don’t talk to me about intellectual things. I have no patience with those. I want to experience life, to feel it, and to enter into things.” These people are always living on their feelings, their emotions. Sometimes we call them “empty headed” because they never seem to use what is in their heads. These are the people who, when you ask them what they think, say, “How do I know what I think until I’ve heard what I have to say?” Or they are concerned about their introverted feelings, always feeling around inside, endlessly examining themselves. There is nothing wrong with self-examination. It is very much a part of the Christian life. But these are people who never do anything else. They are constantly looking at themselves, examining themselves, wringing their hands, expressing gloom and morbidity over what they find.

Then, of course, there are those who say, “I have no patience with the thinker, or with the feeler. I’m a man of practicality.” “Hardheaded,” we call them, involved only in deeds, concerned only with practical matters. “What do you do?” is always the issue with them. All three of these extremes are wrong. They are unbalanced, they are not what God intends man to be. It is the devil who pushes us into them. It is the devil who takes each of these elements and tries to get us off balance within them.

1. Take the realm of the mind, for instance. It is the wiles of the devil which seek to exalt reason to the exclusion of faith. Faith is a function of the emotions, the soul. That is why faith is the most human characteristic of man – because it

is a function of the soul, that element of man which is our basic motivator. That is why everyone can exercise faith. You are not human, you are not even alive, if you cannot exercise faith. But the devil tries to move from a balance in this area to an exaltation of reason by appealing to our pride. We love to think of ourselves as logicians, who move logically from one thought to another. We justify everything we do on the basis that it is a logical development of a certain premise which we have taken. But this exaltation of reason opens the door to error and deceit.

One of the great examples of this, which we heard a good deal about in the past, was in the appearance of the book, *Honest to God*. This book has bothered many Christians, and rightly so, and has aroused much controversy and discussion both in the religious world and in the world of intellectualism. What is its thesis? It was written by a bishop of the Church of England. He is simply saying that the Bible, as it is and has been for centuries, is too primitive. It no longer makes its appeal to “grown-up man,” to “man come of age.” All these descriptive phrases make their subtle appeal to the pride of the intellect. “Man come of age,” “Twentieth century man!” The Bible, the author says, offends the integrity of modern man, strains his credulity. We can no longer accept it as a historical record, we can no longer view it that way. It is but the attempt on the part of the early church to express things in mythical form. These things did not really happen, but are reported as though they happened in order that we might get the great truth behind them. Man “come of age” does not worry about the form in which truth comes, but with the truth itself. This is his thesis. Therefore, “man come of age” needs to have a new concept of God. Man needs to understand God in a different light. What is this new concept? What is this amazing insight into which mature man has at last come, through the difficult struggle of the ages, having finally grown up and now being able to see something new about God? What is it? Well, it is that God is no longer the Father, as our Lord Jesus pictured him (which he ridicules as “the Old Man in the Sky” concept). God is not a Father, in that sense. The new idea is that God is 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 this new 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 evidences of a superstitious, ignorant, pagan faith everywhere he went – even finding an altar that was inscribed ‘To The Unknown God.’ He said to them, “It is the God whom you ignorantly worship that I have come to declare to 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 God who made the heavens and the earth and all things that are in them. Your own poets have recognized the fact that God is not far from anyone of us, for ‘in him we live and move and have our being,’” {cf, Acts 17:24-28}. They already knew that much about God. That is the simplest level of faith – primitive faith, the faith which is the result of an ignorant searching and groping after God.

This book shows how cleverly the devil succeeds in pushing the mind of man, through an appeal to his pride, out to what he thinks are new advances, but what are nothing but the simplest, most primitive understanding of God.

2. Again, in this realm of the mind, the devil is constantly trying to create doubt. It is here he plants his heresies 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 with the Bible, and you will see that it is simply taking some aspect of truth and blowing it up out of proportion – extremism. 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 that way. 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 such thing as the devil. Then he is perfectly free to do exactly what he wants to do with humanity. But if someone wakes up to that and refuses to take that position, then what does he do? Well, he comes and says, “You’re perfectly right! Of course there is a devil. You know it and I know it. But my power, my cunning, my strategy and my willness 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 other extremist positions in that direction.

With Christians, the devil works this way in the realm of the mind. He gets us overconcerned in certain points of theology. There are those Christians who pride themselves on being Bible students and who know all the ins and outs of theology. They wander through all the dark woods of theological differences and climb the icy peaks of Mt. Everest doctrines, such as predestination and the decrees of God and such things. For them, all that matters is doctrine. Or perhaps it is prophecy, of Bible numerics, i.e., the numbers of the Bible. They get so involved studying the numbers of the Bible that they end up hiring a computer to study their Bible with. Extremism! That is the devil’s action, that is his way.

3. Take the realm of feelings. Here is a prolific area of satanic attack. We are so used to believing our feelings. From babyhood we have been used to reacting to the way we feel and accepting the way we feel as a legitimate and accurate description of the way things are. Nothing could be more foolish. There is nothing that is more uncertain and more unrealistic than our feelings. Most of the time they do not relate to reality at all because they are subject to so many influences.
 - The devil moves some Christians to live on a plane of exhilaration, of constant joy.

When they get together their meetings are a riot of handclapping, shouting and religious joy – or perhaps more accurately, a religious jag.

- Others he pushes to the opposite extreme. They think to express happiness as a Christian marks them as sinful. They are all gloom and introspection, morbidity.
- Or he leads people to shift from one to another – one time they are up and the next moment they are down, one day they are on top and the next day, because of their feelings, they are down in the depths and the troughs. They live on an emotional teeter-totter. If this describes you then you have already 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 worry and fretful complaint. But when they see that is wrong, then the devil blandly seeks to push them over to the other side and they become callous and cynical, not caring for anybody. The devil always makes his appeal in this realm to our fears, while God makes his appeal to faith. From faith comes hope and love, but the devil pushes 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 is 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, he has laid waste that which God loves and desires to bless.

4. Take the realm of deeds. Here again the devil is constantly at work seeking to get us involved in doing things. Ah, but we want to have fun when we do things, we want pleasurable things

and so he gets some to seek a continual round of something new, something exciting. We have to be constantly satisfied with some exciting activity. The devil pushes others in the other direction. All they want is the same thing, over and over again. They get into a rut. Traditionalism, they call it, and they defend it. They say, “These people that are forever running after new things! Not for me. I want the same thing for breakfast every morning, for lunch every day, for supper every night. I come home at the same time, I read the same page of the same paper at the same hour of the day.” Everything is the same.

God never intended life to be lived that way, or the other way. God’s will for man represents a great highway right through the center of life where the whole man is ministered to. That is where the Lord Jesus walked and that is where the Scriptures take us, if we walk by them.

This is but the merest survey of this subject today. I cannot possibly cover all the bewildering variety of ways the devil can influence us, and attack us. I have said almost nothing about his attack through the world, with its illusions, its allures, and its pressures to conform – “Everybody does it, you know. This is the ‘in’ thing to do.” The devil gets us that way. But that is why we have the Scriptures, that is why the Word of God is given to us – that it might instruct us in all the ways of evil. No wonder we do not escape if we will not give ourselves to an understanding of these.

But perhaps I have said enough to make you ask yourself, “Who is sufficient for these things? How can we possibly understand all this? Who can hope to win against such a variety of ways of attack that we don’t even recognize are wrong? Who can even grasp, let alone answer, these subtle and powerful attacks against human life?”

Does it leave you feeling rather discouraged?

If it does, then let me say you have not understood what Paul is saying here. His word to us is:

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}

There is a provision made. Perhaps the most healthy attitude we could have in the face of this revelation is to be overpoweringly aware of our sense of weakness.

It is when we recognize we are weak that we're ready to, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might," and we are ready to give intelligent consideration to what that is, and how to do it.

That is where we will start next time: "Put on the whole armor of God." We will look at the means God has provided by which we may stand in the midst of this difficulty, this darkness, this attack upon us, and overcome it and live in victory, unmoved and undefeated. Then, and only then, will we be able to take 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.

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 its ways, and in the immediate situation in which we find ourselves. We have already seen that it is a struggle. The passage we are looking at in Ephesians points out that life is a conflict. And our experience confirms this. We do not like it, perhaps, but we cannot deny it. When we ask ourselves, "Why is life a struggle?" the Apostle Paul says that it is not what we usually imagine to be the problem – it is not flesh and blood, it is not other people. We are so 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 which are in heavenly or high places. Phillips translates that last phrase, "spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil."

In previous messages we tried to see what is meant by the phrase, "the wiles of the devil," how the devil works in his craftiness, in his wiliness, trapping us, snaring us with subterfuges and stratagems. That survey was very hurried and incomplete. It would take many messages to cover the approaches the devil can use 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 flesh. The world is human society influenced by satanic philosophies and reflecting satanic ideas. The flesh is that inner 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 the flesh, the devil

attacks us through the channels of our mind, our emotions, and our activities. These constitute our 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. Wherever we find ourselves victims of 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 confused, uncertain, not knowing what is the truth, what is right, what is the answer? Are you indifferent, letting life go by, living each moment with cynicism, indifferent to what the outcome may be? If so, then you have already become a victim of the wiles of the devil. If these conditions continue, the end inevitably will be barrenness, futility, a wasted life, ruin. That is what the devil aims for.

Jesus said the devil is a liar and a murderer whose 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 adequate 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 an answer but it does not tell us exactly what it is. Our question always is, "How do you do this?" How, exactly, do you 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 a clue to 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 himself. 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 him as our defense against the stratagems of the devil. It is not merely Christ available to us, but Christ actually 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 says to 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 learn how to lay hold of Christ in a practical way. General truth, I have discovered (and I am sure you have too), does not help us very much.

It is easy to speak in empty generalities about Christian living. Sometimes we pick a phrase out of Scripture and employ it almost as an incantation, some kind of magic defense, going about repeating certain words. But that is not the way the Bible suggests. That is the way the cults treat the Bible. It is easy for us to say glibly to some Christian who is struggling through a difficult time, “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 describes. 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 this text:

1. First, there are two general divisions or classifications of the pieces of this armor, indicated by the tenses of 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.

The second division includes those things which are to be put on or taken up at the present moment:

- “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 be sure they are there and remind ourselves of what they mean. Second, there are aspects of Christ which we take up again and again whenever we feel under attack.

2. 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 the listing of these items is very, very important. You cannot reverse them or mix them up. The reason many Christians fail 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, this is the place to start: “Gird up your loins with truth.” The officers in the Roman army wore short skirts, very much 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 free and unimpeded for the fight. Girding the loins was always a symbol of readiness to fight. That is why this is first. 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? Well, you 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! You find 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! [i.e., in uncleanness and licentiousness, etc.] – **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, he is reality, he is 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 him as the authority without any evidence to support it. That’s blind faith.” But that is not what a Christian does. Christian faith is not blind faith. When we believe Christ is the truth, we believe it because he demonstrated 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 in-

sights into what human life was about ever given in the hearing of men. Even his enemies say so. No one ever saw so clearly as he, no one ever probed so deeply or put his finger so precisely upon the elements which make up human life and thinking. In what he said you can see he spoke the truth. “No one ever 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 an amazing 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, of course, 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 philosopher, what other thinker, what other man who has ever challenged men has ever done anything like that – 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 historically true. Of course they are historically true, and of course it greatly matters, for these events demonstrate that Jesus was 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 beginnings. Did he deliver 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, but 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. Many philosophies can do something. Ah, yes, many systems which basically are wrong still can help in a limited area. They can help somewhere, they can accomplish some good. But, my Christian friends, we must learn 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 and high 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 to come to his old friend, a music teacher, and said to him in that flippant way 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.’ It is ‘A’ today, it was ‘A’ five thousand years ago, and it will be ‘A’ ten thousand years from now. The soprano upstairs sings off-key, the tenor across the hall flats his high notes, and the piano downstairs is 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, Heb 13:8}. That is how you know you have truth. Remember that when you feel defeated, when you are under attack, 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? “Having 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 that 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 they are a 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 of faith has faded, and they feel God is angry with them or that he is distant, far off somewhere. There is a constant sense of guilt. Their conscience is always stabbing them, making them unhappy, miserable. They feel God blames them. This is simply a satanic attack, a means of opposing and destroying what God intends to do.

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 are still on that basis.

This is why Paul begins his great eighth chapter to the Romans with the words, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” {Rom 8:1 RSV}. No condemnation! You are believing a lie when you believe that God is angry with you and that he rejects you. Remember, you stand on Christ’s merits, “accepted in the Beloved,” {Eph 1:6 KJV}. Further on in that chapter he asks, “Who can accuse us?” {cf, Rom 8:33}. It is God who justifies. Christ, who died for us, is the only one who has the right to accuse

us, and he loves us. Therefore there is no separation. “Who can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?” {cf, Rom 8:35a}. Who can do this?

Now this does not mean that God puts his hand on the things we know are wrong in our lives and says, “Oh, well, these things do not matter. Don’t worry about these.” Of course not. But it means he sees them, and he says, “Oh, yes, but he hasn’t learned yet all that I intend to teach him.” And he deals with us as a father, in love and patient discipline – as a father, not as a judge.

See how the Apostle Paul himself used this breastplate of righteousness when he was under pressure to be discouraged and defeated. Have you ever thought of the struggles he personally had in this realm? Here was a man who was small of stature, unimpressive, in his personal appearance. In fact, there is very good evidence to indicate that he was even repulsive to many. He had a disfiguring physical ailment which made him unpleasant to look at. The last thing he had was what is called a commanding presence. His background was anti-Christian and he could never get away from that completely. He had been the most hostile, brutal persecutor of the church they had known. He must constantly have run across families with loved ones whom he had put to death. He was often reminded by many people that he was not one of the original twelve apostles, that his calling was suspect, that perhaps he really was not an apostle at all. Writing to the Corinthians about these very matters, he says of himself in Chapter 15, “I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God,” {1 Cor 15:9 RSV}.

What a ground for discouragement! How easy it would have been for him to my to himself, “What’s the use? Here I am working my head off, working my fingers to the bone, making tents and trying to preach the gospel to these people, and look at the blessing God has brought them, but they don’t care. They hurl recriminations back into my face. Why try anymore?” But that is not what he does. The very next verse says, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain,” {1 Cor 15:10a RSV}. There he is using the breastplate of righteousness. I don’t care, he says, what I have been, I don’t defend what I am. I simply say to you, by the grace of God, I am what I am. What I am is what Christ has made me. I’m not standing on my righteousness, I’m standing

on his, I am accepted by grace, and my personal situation does not make any difference at all. So his heart was kept from discouragement. He could say, “Sure, all these things are true, but that does not change the fact that I am Christ’s man, and I have his power. He is in me and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” {cf, Phil 4:13}. Thus he reminded himself that when he became a Christian he had put on the breastplate of righteousness and he never allowed himself to be discouraged, for he did not look to himself for anything at all. He looked to Christ.

Then this third piece of armor – “**Having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace.**” Shoes are absolutely essential to fighting. Imagine a soldier clad in armor from head to foot but with no shoes on, a barefoot soldier. Imagine how quickly the rough ground would tear his feet and bruise them. Soon, despite the fact that he had all the equipment he needed otherwise, he would be out of combat. His feet would render him unfit to fight. But with a stout pair of shoes he would be ready and equipped, able to fight. That is what this phrase means. *Equipment* here is really the word “readiness” in Greek: “Your feet shod with the readiness produced by the good news of peace.” It is peace in the heart that makes you able to fight.

What does this mean? Well, again it is Christ, but Christ our peace this time – our source of calm, euphoria, i.e., a sense of well-being. Notice the relation of one piece to another and the importance of the order that I 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 grasp 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 of that? Our hearts are at peace! Paul says, “Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord 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 raining down all the time? The situation was really desperate. Then Winston Churchill would come on the radio and 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 again, and 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 which has come into my heart through a recent experience. Oh, the joy of this thing – even though it was a time of 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 realm of the thought life, in the realm of our attitudes. It is a battle in the realm of your outlook upon the situation in which you find yourself. This is the place to start. Gird up your loins with truth. Remember that in Jesus Christ you have a demonstration which no man can equal anywhere in the world. Here is the key to life, the 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, then believe 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 has come 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 ex-

perience, and a time of battles – and we will lose some of them. But he says, "I have 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 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 place to start is to remember who you are, what you are, and above all else, whom you have. Be strong in his strength and for his sake. Remember you belong to Christ's family. The Scripture says he is not ashamed to call us brothers. God is not ashamed to be called our God. Be strong for his sake. Let us get away from this subjectiveness all the time – "What is going to happen to me, and how do I feel?" – remembering that God 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. You will have 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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Defense Against Defeat, Part 2

by Ray C. Stedman

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

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’m going through. Everything is so discouraging and there is simply nothing I can do about it.” As one woman put it, “I think when God sends me tribulation, he expects me to tribulate a little bit!” There is the clear implication in this approach that God is somehow to blame. We do not say so, of course. We never say that, but we leave hanging in the air the clear suggestion that God is giving us too big a share of difficulty.

There is nothing which more surely indicates we have already succumbed to the wiles of the devil than to complain about what happens to us. This is why the Word of God invariably points out that the

mark of a Christian who has learned how to be a Christian is that he rejoices in everything, gives thanks in all things.

Now, that does not mean he enjoys everything. Nor does it mean that he merely pretends to rejoice in everything. There is nothing as ghastly as the forced smile people put on and the flippant attitude they assume in the midst of difficulties because they think this is what a Christian ought to do. It is possible genuinely to rejoice through tears, and there is nothing which more surely indicates that we have failed to understand what it means to be a Christian than a whining, complaining, griping, grouching attitude toward what happens to us in life.

Do not be surprised at the devil’s attack. Of course he attacks. That is his character. That is his nature. We need not be surprised that he does this. Furthermore, God lets him do it. This is the clear revelation of Scripture. He permits these attacks because, for one thing, we need them. We never would develop or grow properly if we were not attacked in this manner. Again, it is this which ultimately accomplishes God’s will. The whole outworking of God’s scheme could never be brought to pass were it not that God permits the devil to do his work today within the limits of God’s overriding will. Let us never forget that. God allows these things to happen, and all the writers of Scripture agree on this.

Peter says, “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial which you must undergo, as though some strange thing were happening to you,” {cf, 1 Pet 4:12}. The Lord Jesus himself said, “In the world you shall have tribulation,” {John 16:33a RSV}. That is the nature of things. “But,” he adds, “be of good cheer. I have overcome the world,” {John 16:33b RSV}. The Apostle Paul says, “No temp-

tation has overtaken you but such as is 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 unusual is happening to us. “No one has ever gone through what we are going through. No one has had to undergo the depression of spirit that we feel.” But Paul says you are so wrong. “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, ...” {cf, 1 Cor 10:13a}. So stop complaining about what happens. It is God’s will for you. Let us face that. And instead of a fretful, peevish, whining attitude, let us do what the Word of God says to do when these things occur. What is that? “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,” {Eph 6:11 RSV}. There is no other way to handle it, there is no other solution to these basic human problems than this. Read it again in Ephesians 6:14-18:

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 naming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. {Eph 6:14-18a RSV}

We have already seen that the armor described here is symbolic, figurative.

The first three pieces of this armor are symbolic of what Christ is to us, what he is prepared to be to us. If we are Christians at all, we have already put on these first three pieces, and the tense of the verb which is used here indicates that. “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” – is something we have already done if we are Christians at all.

If we have not done this then we are not Christians and we need to start there.

But now, having done this, when we feel discouraged, upset, defeated, depressed, anxious, fearful, confused, uncertain – whatever the form of attack may be – we are to remind ourselves first of all of these great truths. This is the ground upon

which we stand. This is that which makes it possible to do battle at all. We are to remind ourselves that Christ is the truth. We have found him to be the key to life. He has demonstrated himself to be the ultimate revelation of reality, the way things really are. He is the key to life, the secret of life.

If someone says that this is merely an act of faith on your part, that this is simply a blind assumption, your answer ought to be, “Of course it is,” because everyone begins there. Every man begins with an assumption of authority. He begins with an act of faith. All accept some principle or person as the final authority in life. It is either another religious leader, or perhaps a principle such as the scientific method, or even nothing more than “what I feel is right,” but man must always start with an act of faith. The distinctive thing about Christianity is that Jesus Christ has more clearly demonstrated the right to be accepted as that authority than anyone else or any other principle in the world today. The Christian therefore bets his life, in a sense, that Jesus Christ is the real authority, the true revelation of things as they really are. He has objectively demonstrated it and subjectively confirmed it to you as a Christian. This is where you must start. Always come back to this. Christ is the truth!

Then, Christ is your righteousness. It is not your behavior, or your lack of behavior, which makes you acceptable to God.

This does not mean, of course, as we will see later on, that someone can say, “Well, if that is the case, then I’ll behave as I please. It doesn’t make any difference.” Paul says in Romans that you cannot do this. It shows you do not understand what God has said to you at all if that is what you say. No, you cannot say that. Rather, you realize that God has accepted you, not because of what you do, or have not done, but because of what Christ is on your behalf, the work that he has done for you. You stand in his righteousness, “accepted in the Beloved,” {Eph 1:6 KJV}. You have the same value in God’s sight as Christ has, and, therefore, Christ is your peace.

That is the third thing. This is the confirmation of the claim that he is our righteousness. It proves that the cross really did do something, because the experience of it in our life now is that we have a sense of peace. We are not lost in a sea of relativity. We have a solid rock on which to stand, an anchor of unchanging certainty in the midst of a

constantly changing, variable world. We have a place on which to stand and fight, and an adequate power with which to face every situation. That is what Jesus Christ is to anyone who knows him. That is peace. That is morale.

A word of warning: Do not try to start with peace. When you get troubled or upset, when attacks come, do not try to start with making your heart feel at peace. This is a mistake many people make; they try to conjure up 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 you 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 set our hearts 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 no good 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 life 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.” These are part of the wiles of the devil, the wiliness, the stratagems of Satan.

They come to us in various forms. Sometimes they are evil thoughts and imaginations which intrude 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 all of 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 this Christianity is nothing after all but a big hoax, some dream which men had. Perhaps we feel that it can all be explained psychologically, or that Jesus Christ is really a humbug, a victim of self-delusion. Perhaps the world 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, imagination. Again, these fiery darts may come in the form of sudden fears, anxieties, a fleeting sensation that 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. They are the fiery darts of the wicked one. We are the biggest fools on earth if we do not see them in that light, and deal 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. We feel, “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? Can a Christian have such a lewd and filthy thought as this? Can I really be a Christian if I think like this. I must not 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 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. Yes, but we know it is still there, lurking underneath, and we feel dishonest because we are not even willing to look at it. This thing takes its toll of us in physical ways as well as in mental and emotional strain and tension. We feel uncertain and confused because we are convinced that the opposite of faith is doubt. We think if we have doubts we cannot have

faith and if we have faith we do not have doubts. Therefore, if we have doubts then we must not and cannot be men and women of faith. We do not see this as the lie of the devil. We think it is our own faithless thinking. This is always the first characteristic of these things. They seem to come to us out of 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 unto thee ...? Did God say that ...?” {cf, Gen 3:1}. There is the implication of doubt. He said to Jesus, in the temptation in the wilderness, “If thou be the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread,” {cf, Matt 4:3, Luke 4:3}. If! There is always the insinuation that these things are not true. This is the way he raises doubts, creates guilt, arouses fear. These are the attacks of the evil one.

What are we to do? How are we to combat these things successfully? Well, the apostle says, “Take the shield of faith with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one.” Notice that he did not say the shield of belief. We have already reminded ourselves of our belief when we recall we have put on the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the equipment of the gospel of peace. That is our belief in what Christ is to us. But faith is more than that. This is very important to see. Faith is acting upon belief. Faith is decision, action, resolution. Faith is saying, “Yes, I believe Christ is the truth. He is my righteousness, he is my peace. Therefore this, and this, and this, must follow. Faith is working out the implications of belief. When you say “Therefore” you move from belief into faith. Faith is particularizing, if you want it put in one word. It is taking the general truth and applying it to the specific situation and saying, “If this be true, then this must follow.” That is the shield of faith.

Do you do that? Have you learned how to take the shield of faith when doubts come? Do you say? ...

“Christ is the truth. He is the basic revelation of things which really are. He has demonstrated it. Therefore, I cannot accept this thought that Christianity is a hoax. I cannot believe both. I cannot believe that Christ is the truth and that this thing is true, too. I have committed myself to Christ because I have been persuaded that he has demonstrated truth fully. I stand on that ground. Therefore I must reject this insinuation.”

Do you reason? ...

“Christ is the truth. Therefore I cannot believe this subtle philosophy which exalts man and makes God unnecessary in human affairs. I must reject it. Since I have found Christ true, I cannot believe this sudden feeling I have of unreality. I must regard it as what Christ says it is. It is from the devil. Jesus Christ says he is a liar from the beginning. Therefore this is a lie and I reject it.”

Do you say these things?

Our problem is that we have become so accustomed to believing our feelings as though they were facts. We never examine them. We never take them and look at them and ask, “It this true?” We simply say, “I feel this way. Therefore it must be true.” This is why so many are constantly defeated – because they accept their feelings as facts.

We are to say:

“Christ is my righteousness. I am linked with him. I am one with him. His life is my life and my life is his life. We are married. Therefore, I cannot believe this lie that these evil thoughts are my thoughts. They are not my thoughts at all. They are thoughts which come into my mind, are insinuated there by another force. It is not my thinking at all. No, it is the devil again. I do not want these thoughts. I do not like them. I reject them. I do not want them in my thinking; therefore they are not mine. They are the devil’s children, and I’ll spank them 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 an attack on faith. The fact that you have doubts proves that you have faith. They are not opposites at all. Doubt is the proof of the reality of faith. Therefore re-examine the ground of your faith and reassert it, and remember that feelings 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 that! He will flee from you. You do it again and again every time the thought comes back. You resist it on that basis. You refuse to give up your position. And, sooner or later, inevitably, the doubts will clear. Your feelings will change, the attacks cease, and you will be back again in the sunshine of faith and the experience of the love and 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 evil one.” The shield of faith is enough in itself. It is all you need. You do not really need the remainder, that is, the last two pieces of the armor. It may sound strange to say that, but it is true. You do not need any more because 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, abundantly. Remember that John said, “Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world,” {1 Jn 4:4 KJV}. Paul 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 till later examining how fully, adequately, and abundantly – more than adequately – this armor is designed to defend us in the midst of a very difficult and changing world. It is thus that we can be “strong in the Lord and in 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:
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools.
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stop and build 'em up with worn out
tools:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your
virtue,
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common
touch
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you:
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run
Yours is the earth and everything that's in it,
And which is more – you'll be a Man, my
son!

That is a very eloquent description of life. It is exactly what the Word of God is designed to prepare us for. That is what it means to be “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.”

Prayer:

Our Father, with what sharpness we realize that this but describing for us the life we are living, the situation in which we find ourselves, the very circumstance in which

we now are. Lord, help us to be men and women of faith, to realize that your word has brought to us the truth as it is in Jesus. Let us not fling away our confidence, nor cast away our reliance upon that unshakable word, but trust in you and show to the world that this is the only thing which can keep a man or a woman standing in the midst of pressures which defeat and ruin and blast and destroy life. We pray in Christ’s name, Amen.

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Defense against Defeat, Part 3

by Ray C. Stedman

We are now embarked upon an attempt to explain life. We want to see why men are so bewildered at what is happening in the world about them, and why they are so impotent in solving the great problems which have confronted men for many centuries. Why is it we seemingly made no progress in this intense struggle that is our life? Our attention now is focused upon one verse of Scripture, Ephesians 6:17, which occurs in the midst of a great call to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,” {Eph 6:10}. The apostle concludes the list of “the armor of God” {Eph 6:11} with this verse:

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. {Eph 6:17}

We are examining this battle of the Christian against “the world rulers of present darkness” {Eph 6:12}, as Paul so very eloquently describes them. We are contending, the apostle says, against the great cunning of the 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 my life, that 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 these fiery 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 are

engaged in 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 meet it. It is, 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 already succumbed to the wiles of the devil. No wonder then that we are defeated by constant frustration, confusion, 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 Satan in 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 this is the only thing that can possibly meet the subtlety, the cunning, the wiliness of the attacks of Satan against us. As we have seen, no degree of human intelligence is equal to the cunning of Satan.

The devil, throughout the centuries, has beaten every man who pits his strength against him. The record of Scripture is that even the greatest of saints, those who have seen clearest and understood most of the reality of life, in trying to meet the devil in their own strength have always been whipped. There is no man who is able to stand against him.

As Martin Luther put it, “On earth is not his equal.”

But we have been provided with an armor, and this armor is perfectly adequate to meet the ruses, the cunning, and the wiliness of the devil.

We must understand what that armor means. We have seen that it is a figurative explanation of Jesus Christ and what Christ is to us.

If you would like it put a different way, this armor is an expansion of Jesus’ words in John 14:20, “you in me, and I in you.” Those are some of the simplest words in the English language. Any child can understand them. They are monosyllables, yet they encompass a truth so profound that I question if anyone ever remotely apprehends all that is involved in these simple words.

The first three pieces of this armor that Paul describes,

- Girding your loins with the girdle of truth,
- Putting on the breastplate of righteousness, and
- Having your feet shod with the equipment of the gospel of peace

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. As 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, i.e., the 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 come before God on the ground of our own puny efforts to have done good, or to have behaved ourselves, or to have pleased him. We stand in Christ’s righteousness and his perfections are imputed to us. In the amazing 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 all suffer. Then we learned that Christ is our peace. He is the source of our sense of calmness, of quietness, of euphoria, of well-being. He is the ground of our morale. Those are the first three pieces of the armor. We have put on 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 our last 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 conclusions from the ground on which we are standing in Christ, which we have taken in him. That is, if Christ is the truth, if Christ is our righteousness, if Jesus Christ is our peace, then this and this is true, and that and that is not true. Thinking it through, we come to a “therefore.” We draw a practical conclusion and thus answer the thoughts which arise within us which tempt us to doubt, or lust, or immorality, weakness, confusion, or 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 continually try to muddle through. We do not do intelligently what God says and apply the shield of faith, i.e., think this thing 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 must 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 mind, 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 Christ as your breastplate of righteousness, you are assuming a position in him which protects you from the sense of guilt and unforgiveness – the most common ground of disturbance to the emotions. It is because we feel guilty that we get emo-

tionally upset and depressed, and the breastplate protects us there. The shoes, as we have already seen, protect us in the area of our will. The shoes of the gospel of peace (Christ as our peace) create a 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 in our 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 in which we find ourselves than this factor which will keep us thinking straight? Was there ever a time when men were more frankly bewildered than they are in our day, or when statesmen were more openly confused and honestly admitting it? The intelligentsia confess being utterly baffled in dealing with the problems with which human 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 determine whether we should be there or not. I just don't know what to believe."

Her uncertainty and bewilderment are echoed by millions today. Even those who take sides on these issues do so largely for emotional reasons. They are unable to give clear, logical arguments as to why they believe what they do. And what about the other issues of our day – birth control, race relations, crime and delinquency, moral decay, disarmament, and teeming misery of our vast city slums? The mind is simply staggered by the complexities and insolubilities of the problems which face human lives. No wonder H. G. Wells wrote at the close of World War II:

Quite apart from any bodily depression, the spectacle of evil in the world – the wanton destruction of homes, the ruthless hounding of decent folk into exile, the bombings of open cities, the cold-blooded massacres and mutila-

tions of children and defenseless gentle folk, the rapes and filthy humiliations, and above all, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment and fear, to a world from which such things had seemed well-nigh banished – all these have come near to breaking my spirit altogether.

He went on from that point to write his last book, *Mind At the End of Its Tether*.

Listen to this startling statement by George Bernard Shaw, renowned in the world as a free-thinker and liberal philosopher. In his last writings he says:

The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led instead directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith.

What a revealing confession of mental confusion and darkness by some of the great leaders of thought in our day! There is no protection in the world for the mind.

But the Christian has the helmet of salvation. What is this helmet, this protection, which keeps our thinking straight in the midst of a very confused world? Paul answers in one word – it is the helmet of satisfaction. He is not talking about the salvation of the soul. He is not referring to salvation as regeneration or conversion. In other words, he is not looking back at all. He is not speaking of salvation as a past decision which was once made, or even as a present experience, but he is looking on to the future. He is talking about a salvation which will be a future event. It is exactly what he is referring to in Romans, the 13th chapter, when he says, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed," {Rom 13:11KJV}.

This helmet is further defined for us by the apostle in his first letter to the Thessalonians, in Chapter 5:

But since we belong to the day [i.e., we Christians], let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. {1 Th 5:8 RSV}

Here, salvation is a hope, something yet in the future, something as yet not possessed or entered into fully. This future tense of salvation is described for us in a number of passages, but very plainly and fully in Romans 8:18-25, and especially in Verses 22-25:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. {Rom 8:22-25 RSV}

Paul is talking about the day of resurrection, the day of the coming again of Christ, the day when creation will be delivered from its bondage, when Christ returns to establish his kingdom. This helmet, therefore, is the 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 will 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 read. "No 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 will establish it and nothing that man does, as man, contributes one thing to this. Not all of human wisdom, not all our vaunted knowledge, or our scientific discoveries will contribute one thing to the ultimate solution. According to the record of Scripture, all that man boasts in shall crumble into dust, and those things which can be shaken 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 by which the devil keeps us off balance and eccentric in our thinking. God is working through

these events of history, but 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 what is 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 in Jesus Christ.

If we see that, it will save so much heartache, delusion, disappointment, and confusion as you read your daily 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 staggered and bewildered by what they find in life? It is because they pinned their hopes on wholly unstable, unrealistic 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 luminous Shape of Things to Come. In *The Food of the Gods* he 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 thinkers built their grandiose dreams on a cloud, a cobweb, a shifting, shimmering illusion. And when the illusion changed 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, temporary 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 that God is working out his purposes and therefore he is not disturbed when human programs go

wrong and everything fails – 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 wars and rumors of wars unto the very end. He expects false teachings and false philosophies and cults and heresies to abound. He is told all this will happen. It is part of the program, part of the total overall plan and purpose and moving of God in history. The Christian knows that wars are unavoidable, even though every effort should be made to avoid them, and that there is no contradiction in this. The Christian knows that war is madness, that nothing 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 mutilating of the bodies and souls of men.

Therefore, when he sees things happening as they are happening in Vietnam these days, he knows that it is unrealistic to expect to stop all this by passing certain legislation, or declaring certain principles, or sitting down 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 squarely on the stubborn refusal of men everywhere to believe the true nature of the problem and the remedy that God's love has fully provided. The Christian knows that demonic forces can rise and possess the world from time to 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 often 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

certain, sure salvation is coming, and that it is even now at work. This is what we need to know. Not merely that it will finally end right, but that the ending is being worked out now! History is not a meaningless jumble but a controlled pattern, and the Lord Jesus Christ is himself the one who is directing these events. He is the Lord of history. God is at work in the selfsame events that we look at with such horror and confusion.

We cannot identify ourselves with all the methods of the worldlings or even with all their aims, but we can identify ourselves with their persons. We do not need to join their causes, but we need to listen to them and to show ourselves concerned about them as people. We can be their friend without joining causes, and, if they balk at that, the choice is theirs and not ours. Jesus said, "The servant is not greater than his master. If they have received me they will receive you also, and if they hate me they will hate you," {cf, John 15:20}. We can expect both reactions as we try to involve ourselves in life around us, not in order to advance these hopeless causes, but rather to interest and concern ourselves with the people involved.

There are also many causes that the Christian can join. There are aims which he can wholeheartedly endorse. Christians are always to be humanitarian – helping the weak, ministering to the sick, helping those who are old, and in prison, or burdened in any way. The Christian should always be ready to further good government, because government is of God. Even the worst of governments has, nevertheless, a basic commitment and relationship to God. "The powers that be are ordained of God" {Rom 13:1b KJV}, the Scripture says. Therefore the Christian ought to be ready to alleviate social evil and to further understanding between countries if he can. Read the injunctions of Scripture. "Honor all men," {1 Pet 2:17}. "Do good to all," {cf, 1 Pet 3:11}. "Honor the king," {1 Pet 2:17}. "Obey your masters," {cf, Col 3:22}. "Provide things honest before all men," {Rom 12:17 KJV}. "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick," {cf, Matt 10:8, Luke 10:9}. These are practical exhortations.

Look at the life of the Lord Jesus himself.

Many are asking today, "Would Jesus have joined the Vietnam Day Committee if he had been here?" or "Where would he have been during the Berkeley riots?" The answer is perfectly predictable. He would not have joined any committee, just

as he joined no social movement in his own day – and there were plenty of them existing then – but he would have been the friend to any who sincerely, even though mistakenly, were seeking to do good. He would have been the angry, vocal foe of any who were hypocritically using a cause to advance their own purposes, or to dirty and defile the minds and hearts of others. As he stood before Pilate, Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world,” {John 18:36 KJV}. That is, “I am no threat to you, Pilate. My kingdom is not of this world. I am not involved in any political maneuverings that you think might be a threat to your position.” Nevertheless, he was known everywhere as the friend of sinners.

All this is possible only if we put on, as a helmet, the hope of salvation. One of the great reasons the church is so confused in this day, and saying so little to the world of true significance, is because it has laid aside, by and large, the hope of the coming of the Lord. There are very few sermons preached on it, very little is said about it. There is no time given to a consideration of what it means, and why it is set forth so frequently, and so clearly, in the Scriptures. Great sections of the Scriptures that deal with this matter are simply ignored among Christians. As a result, our thinking is muddled and confused. The church does not know which side to take or where to stand. It has nothing to say, or, at best, it gives an uncertain sound which calls no one to battle and encourages no 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,” {Matt 24:42, 25:13}. We must live daily in its hope and anticipation. The battle is not ours. This is not merely a private fight we are engaged in. We have been talking about this great struggle against the devil and his angels, against the principalities and powers, against the wiles of the devil, as though it were primarily a private fight. It does come down to that at last. It meets us right where we live – in our homes, our offices, our relationship with our fellow human beings everywhere we turn – but it is not only that, and it is always good to remember the fact. The battle is not ours, but the Lord’s. We are individual units fighting in a great army. The ultimate cause is sure and the end is certain. We do not need to be troubled by all the

things happening on the face of the earth, for our Conqueror has already won. Though we may be hard pressed in our immediate realm in this battle, the cause is never in doubt. The end is absolutely certain, the outcome is sure, the battle is the Lord’s. It is not, finally, and ultimately, a struggle between us and the devil, but a struggle between Christ and Satan, and the outcome is completely sure!

Remember this!

When you pick up your newspapers and read frightening accounts of things which are happening, the destruction of moral principles which have supported and strengthened this nation for decades, remember that God has said that science will never succeed in working out human problems, and that statesmen will never succeed in producing the Great Society upon this earth. It is not wrong to try, but every Christian knows they will never succeed, that human knowledge will contribute nothing, absolutely nothing, to the glorious age which is to come at last upon the earth. But remember also that God is always at work in human life and in society. He is at work through his Body, to heal and to help, to love and to suffer, until that morning without clouds shall dawn, and the day break, and every shadow flee away.

Are you frightened by world prospects? Let me tell you this: It is going to get much worse! Jesus said men’s hearts shall fail them for fear of looking after the things that are coming to pass on the face of the earth. If you think it is hard to stand now, if these things throw you for a loss now, what will it be when the darkness increases, and the cause looks hopeless, and things get very much worse? That is the hour when we desperately must have the hope of salvation, the helmet to protect the mind.

The writer of Hebrews says, “We do not yet see all things in subjection to man, but we see Jesus!” {cf, Heb 2:8-9}. It is that which sustains the mind in all hours of pressure.

Here in this favored land of ours we have so much for which we can give thanks. God in grace has granted that we might be relatively free from so much that bothers and distresses others. But there are great areas of the world already where faith is not permitted to be expressed openly like this, where the darkness is far greater than here, where the forces of wrong seem to be striding in unopposed triumph through the land, and nothing seems

to stand in their way. What do Christians do in those places? They have only one thing they can do – they must put on the helmet of the hope of salvation. This will keep their thinking straight. It directs them in the causes to which they give themselves. It gives them advice and counsel as to where they should put their efforts and in what they should make investments of time and money and enterprise.

It can do the same for us. We need not succumb to the delusion of the world – that redemption, salvation, and the working out of all human problems by the application of human intelligence is just beyond the horizon, in a little while now, if we can just get over into the new era, everything will be all right. How long has the world grasped at that futile dream? Read the ancient writings of the Greek philosophers and you will see they were saying the same things then. As far back as human history goes, men have ever been grasping after this illusive hope that something can be worked out here. But God has never said that. Consistently, throughout the Scriptures, he has said that man in his fallen condition is unable, absolutely and totally unable, to work out his problems. “When the strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are

at peace,” {cf, Luke 11:21}. There is no threat to his kingdom from within; there cannot be. We are shut up to the salvation of God. But in the strength of that hope we can keep our minds and our hearts calm and undisturbed in the day of battle, in the day of darkness.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for this reassuring word. We know that things are not nearly as bad as they could be, or even perhaps as they shall be. But we thank you for the constant assurance you give to us that even when they get worse they are in your control, that nothing can come which you do not permit, nothing can happen which is not already anticipated and worked out, that the battle is the Lord's. Thank you for the certainty that we stand in the power of God and in the strength of his might, and that our hope is not in the flimsy constructions of men but in the eternal purposes of a living God. Thank you for this encouragement to our hearts today. In Christ's name, Amen.

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Defense against Defeat, Part 4

by Ray C. Stedman

We are now engaged in examining Paul's great exhortation to the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We, as they were, are involved in the struggle and conflict which comes from contention with the principalities and powers and the wicked spirits in high places, the world rulers of this present darkness. In Verses 14-17 of the sixth chapter, the apostle focuses on the armor of God:

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}

This armor defends us under attack and makes it possible for us to stand in an evil day. How accurately the apostle describes our experience – continually facing evil days, days in which everything seems to go wrong, when trouble comes, tragedy strikes, difficulties occur, or discouragement sets in, and we wonder what is happening in the world and in our personal lives.

We have looked at the specific form in which this attack occurs. We have noted the source of it, and the ubiquity of it. It comes from every side and in every waking moment of our lives. Always it is an attempt to derail our Christian faith, to upset our lives, to destroy our morale, to defeat our hopes, and deny our claims. This conflict is experienced by men everywhere; it is not unique to Christians. But it is only the Christian who is in a place to fight back.

As Christians we are delivered by Christ from the unconscious control of Satan and are thus able to resist the attack of the devil, to fight back, and to overcome. The Christian does this by putting on the armor of God.

This passage addresses itself to us in a figurative way, but it is speaking of very realistic things which I hope 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 three pieces of this armor pictures Christ as the truth, i.e., the basic secret to life, the ground of reality; then Christ as our righteousness, the One on whose merits we stand before God and are accepted; and Christ as our peace, the source of our morale, of our inner strength, of that which gives purpose to life. All this is fulfillment of our Lord's words, "you in me," {John 14:20b}. Then the last three pieces of this armor set forth the truth of "I in you" {John 14:20c} – Christ appropriated and applied to life. We looked at the shield of faith, which involves applying general truth to specific situations, i.e., acting upon our belief. Nothing can be done without faith. God's power is made available only in faith. Then we looked at the helmet of hope, which is to use the fact of the return of Jesus Christ as a guide in evaluating the worth of movements in our own day, a guide to 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 specifics. It is so very easy to have a vague sense of following Christ, but not know exactly, in specific terms, what this means. But that is why the Word of God has been given to us, for it is that which makes Christianity manageable.

Christian truth as a whole is more than we can handle. It has to be broken down into manageable pieces. This 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 Jesus Christ and the authority of the Scripture are one and the same. There are many today who challenge this. There are many voices which tell us that as Christians we must follow Christ and accept the authority of Christ, but we need not accept the authority of the Bible. But Paul answers that one by calling the Scriptures "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 is 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 Bible as a witness of certain men to what they thought of Jesus Christ. But you seem to go further. You have used the word 'inspired' on several occasions in your paper, and this seems to suggest that in your opinion the Bible is more than the views of men, that it has divine authority. Is this true?" The Christian professor made a very wise answer. He said, "My answer may sound to you very much like Sunday school propaganda, but I can only put it this way: The center of my life is Jesus Christ. I have found him to be the key to everything I desire in life. And yet I could know nothing about Christ if I did not learn it from the Bible. The Bible presents 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 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 it is not the complete Bible which is referred to by the phrase, "**the word of God.**" Let us do a little donkey work, if you will permit me. There are two words used in Scripture for "the word of God." There is the familiar word, *logos*, which is used in the opening verse of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*), and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God," {John 1:1}. Then there is another word, used less frequently, *rhema*, which is somewhat different in meaning. *Logos* refers to the total utterance of God, the complete revelation of what God has said. *Hrema* means a specific saying of God, a passage or a verse which has special application to an immediate situation; to use a modern term, it is the Word of God used existentially, i.e., applied to experience, to our existence.

Hrema is the word used here. The "sword of the Spirit" is the saying of God applied to a specific situation. This is the great weapon placed in the hands of a believer. Perhaps all of us have had some experience with this. We have all read passages of Scripture when the words suddenly seemed to come alive, take on flesh and bones, and leap out of the page at us, or grow eyes that follow us around everywhere we go, or develop a voice that echoes in our ears until we cannot get away from it. We have had this experience:

- Perhaps in some moment of temptation or doubt, when we were assailed by what Paul calls here "the flaming darts of the evil one." But it has been answered immediately by a passage of Scripture which flashed to mind, something we had not been thinking of at all, but which supplied the needed answer.
- Or perhaps we have been asked a question, and for a moment it has caught us off guard; we did not know how to answer and were about to say, "I don't know," when suddenly we had a moment of illumination and a word of Scripture came to mind, and we saw what the answer was.

- Perhaps this experience has come while sitting in a meeting where some passage has come home to our heart with strange and powerful effect upon us. We have been greatly moved, and, in that moment, we made a deep, permanent decision.

All this is the *hrema* of God, the sayings of God which strike home like arrows to the heart. That is why this is called “the sword of the Spirit,” because it is not only originated by him as the author of the Word, but it is also recalled to mind by the Spirit and made powerful by him in our lives. It is his answer to the attack of the devil, who comes to discourage us, defeat us, lure us aside, deceive us, misguide us, or mislead us in some way – but then a word comes to mind instantly. This is the sword of the Spirit.

As a sword, it is useful both for defense and for offense. This, by the way, is the only part of the armor designed for offense. It both defends and protects us, but also pierces other hearts and destroys the lies of the devil in others besides ourselves. This is its great effect. It is the only proper defense the Christian has. He is to proclaim the truth. He does not need to defend it. He does not need to support it with long and extensive arguments. There is a place for that, but not in an encounter with those who disbelieve. He is to proclaim it, simply to declare it. As Scripture says in Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. {Heb 4:12 RSV}

It gets below reason, and pierces the armor that has been erected against it, and comes home to the heart. Thus it has power in itself.

It is this offensive quality which explains why the Bible is so continuously under attack. For centuries the enemies of the gospel, prompted by the devil, have been seeking to destroy the Bible, if not its actual existence, as they have at certain times, they seek at least to destroy its significance. This is what we are facing in our own day. With very clever words and subtle arguments, the devil

speaks through men of prominence and intelligence to destroy the testimony of the Scriptures. This does not mean that the men themselves are necessarily hypocritical. It is not that they are being deliberately and knowingly destructive. Many of them are sincerely attempting to be what they may describe as “honest to God.” But the evidence that this is a satanic attack upon the Bible, and that their thinking has a satanic bias, is seen in the specific target of these attacks. They are always an attack upon the historic genuineness of the biblical record. By that you can tell where they originate. They are attempts to reject the supernatural character of the biblical accounts, the intrusion into our commonplace realm of space and time of that invisible realm which the Bible calls the kingdom of God. This is what they dislike, and the aim of their attacks is always to make the Bible appear incredible or unreliable, so no one will bother to read it. They desire to create such false images of the biblical records that no one will take 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 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 way.

Let me illustrate this with the Christmas story. Nothing is more basic and central to the Christian message than the story of the way the infinite God became a babe in a manger, and was welcomed with the angel’s song, 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 twenty centuries. But now listen to the way the false prophets of our day treat this story. Here is a quotation from the well-known book by Bishop Robinson, *Honest 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 which 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 literal 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 supernatural claims of the biblical story – they are merely dismissed with a wave of the hand. Scorn is heaped upon them and they are regarded as unworthy of modern intelligence. The implication is clear that any who believe in this story are in a class with those who still believe in a flat earth or are like children who still believe in fairies. The reason for this, of course, is that any acceptance of this as an historical fact so grounds this story in history that its implications cannot be shaken aside. We must face it as an incontrovertible event that can only be explained by the explanation which Scripture gives: The need of men, in their lost condition, for an invasion of God in order that he might accomplish a work of redemption at great cost to himself and thus set men free.

What is the answer to these false claims? Well, simply read the Scriptural accounts. Read the Christmas story as told by Matthew and Luke. As you read the familiar tale, see how artlessly, how simply it is presented, how uncontrived the record is. There is no attempt to garnish it or to

bolster it with arguments or theological explanations. There is just the simple narrative of what happened to a couple on their way to Bethlehem, what occurred when they arrived there, and what happened in the immediate days following. When that story is set in place in the total narrative of the Bible, how fitting it is, how natural, how unforced. As G. Campbell Morgan so beautifully put it, "The song of the angels to sighing humanity is the beginning of the infinite mystery of an incarnate God. From that simple story all light is streaming, all hope is flaming, all songs are coming." Wesley captures this beautifully in his hymn:

Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of the Virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
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 these events, ever suggests that these did not take place exactly as recorded. And the stories were well-known in their day.

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

This is the purpose of these "sayings of God." They are a sword of the Spirit to defend against that 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 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 arrested by a word I had memorized as a young Christian and which has come to me many times since. It is in 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 logical. But this fails to recognize the fact that we are easily deceived. We are not the rational creatures we love to think we are. There is much illusion and delusion in our world and we are not intelligent enough to see through these phantasmata, 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 midst of it, or right afterward. It has thus become the means of preventing any painful recurrences. I 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 letter of James, “The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God,” {Jas 1:20 RSV}. That 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: “Only by pride comes contention,” {cf, Prov 13:10 KJV}. When we get involved in contentions and strifes with one another it is so easy to blame the other fellow. “He started it!” One day one of my nephews and my daughter were fighting and I asked them, “Who started this?” And the boy said, “She did. 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 of it.

- As a young Christian I recall how the powerful lure to sexual misbehavior which exists in this world was frequently dispelled in my thinking by the remembrance, the sudden flashing recollection of that word in Ephesians 5: “Let no man deceive you with empty words [and that is exactly what they try to do] 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 – that it is not a lightning bolt from heaven or an auto accident or something like that, but rather it is the certain disintegration of life, the dehumanizing, the brutalization of life which comes when one gives way 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 terrible depression of spirit, an utter desolation of mind. I have never met such a lonely, miserable outcast of a man. He shut himself away from everyone. His liberation began by repeatedly praying one single phrase of Scripture – all the Scripture he could, in faith, lay hold of. Everything else I tried to point out to him he would 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. Today he is living a normal, free life, set free by the saying of God – “the sword of the Spirit which is the saying 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 Lord.

The Lord Jesus said, “It is they [the Scriptures] that bear witness to me,” (John 5:39). This is the

way you come to know Christ. There is no way apart from the Scriptures. And there is no way to come into full 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 reject it or treat it lightly. Take it seriously. The Spirit of God has brought it to mind for a purpose; therefore give heed to it, obey it.

Now, one word of caution is needed here. We are also to compare Scripture with Scripture. This is a very important matter, for remember, the devil can quote Scripture as well – as he did on one occasion with the Lord. But the quotation of the Scripture by the devil is never balanced. The sword of the Spirit in the devil's 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, Luke 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. "Man shall 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 can quote it too. There is a verse in the Psalms, you know, that says if you get yourself into a dangerous position God will send his angels to uphold you." Taking Jesus to the top of the temple, he said, "Cast yourself 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 all 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. Compare it. It is in balance? Is it held in

relationship to other truth in the Word of God? "It is written again, you shall 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 this 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 serve,'" {cf, Matt 4:10}. Then, the account says, the devil left him. This is always what happens. He is put to rout 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, and 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 all you 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 has nothing against that – but you will not need all the remedies science has now made available to give us a chemical 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 enemy is to become a Christian. You must be delivered by the work of Jesus Christ from the kingdom of Satan 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 this when you 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. Though they may have the armor of God, they do not employ it. If you feel yourself growing cold or lukewarm, you are under attack from the wiles of the devil. If you find yourself depressed or discouraged, or are bothered with doubts, fears, and anxieties, or if you feel the lure of lusts, the crush of pain, or the numbness of disappointment – what shall you do? Systematically, thoughtfully, deliberately, repeatedly, go through these steps.

Think through this armor of God.

Do not give up if no immediate change occurs. We are so brainwashed these days into wanting quick results, immediate relief, instant deliverance. But the attack may be prolonged, and there are not always quick results. This is why the apostle says, “Having done all, stand.” This is all – stand!

I want to say more about this in another message. But victory is sure if you persevere. You are

doing the right thing; now keep on doing it. Do not give up, it is only a matter of time. For the word of the promise is sure: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

And while you are waiting there is one more thing you can do. It is not in the nature of effort so much as in the character of release, relief, help in the midst of this pressure. You can pray.

We shall start there next time: “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”

Prayer:

Our Father, what practical import there is in these matters. How helpful this word is in the midst of our pressures, our discouragements, and our tendencies to defeat. Grant to us, Lord, that we will take them seriously and apply this great armor that is given to us in Jesus Christ and thus learn how full and rich and exciting life can be as a Christian, lived in your strength. For we ask in your name, Amen.

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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, basic approach:

We looked first at the struggle, the conflict against what Paul calls, "the world rulers of this present darkness" {Eph 6:12 RSV}, as suggesting to us the only adequate explanation of what is going on in our world today, and has been for many centuries. We saw that this struggle is synonymous with life as we know it. It describes what is happening right where you are in the midst of the world, with evil rampant around you and seemingly everybody and everything doing all they can to discourage you, drag you down, and defeat you. As Paul put it, in a vivid description of his own experience, "fightings within and fears without," {cf, 2 Cor 7:5}.

Second, we tried to spend some time with what the apostle says should be our response to this struggle, 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 himself 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 must go a step further and explore the second thing the

apostle says the Christian should do when he is facing 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 utterance 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 two 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 divide 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 it in terms of your present struggle and experience. Putting on the armor is essentially something that is done in the realm of your thought life. We have been trying to make that clear. It is an adjustment of the attitude of your heart to reality, to things as they really are. It is thinking through the implications of the fact which revelation 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 such strange 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 basis, we 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 to your 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 his 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 to 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 how to do. As we learn how to do it, the process becomes much more rapid. Almost instantaneously we can think through 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 dangerous to think and not to do. It is a violation of our basic humanity merely to think and not have that thought result at last 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 a practical application in any way. As I have suggested, this is very dangerous because we human beings are made both to think and to do, and it must be in that order. We receive information first, we assimilate it, correlate it, and think it through. This is the first thing. And then we act upon that which we have both thought and felt. 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 of 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 ever to act without having first thought. Yet it is possible to think without ever acting. That is what the apostle 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 friends may be glad of that, but it is very frustrating to you! So the complement to putting on the armor of God, the activity 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 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, so impotent. There is great practical help here if we follow carefully the designated order of Scripture. I think most Christians, if they were honest, would confess that they are dissatisfied with their prayer life. They feel 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 we attempt 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 in doing it 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. Prayer follows putting on the armor of God. It is a natural, normal outgrowth. Now, I am not suggesting that there is no place for Christian discipline; there is. I am not suggesting that we will not need to take our wills and put them to a 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 level with that jingle you have all heard of the man who prayed, “Bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more.” Sometimes our prayers are only a cut above the simple childhood prayer: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” What is needed? Prayer should be an outgrowth of thoughtfulness about the implications of faith. This adds depth, meaning, and significance to it. Prayer should be pointed and purposeful.

Now, basically, what is prayer? We are talking about this great theme as the apostle has brought it to our attention, but what, basically, is prayer?

- Is it a mere superstition, as some people think – a mumbling, a talking to yourself under the deluded dream that you are addressing a deity?
- Or is it a form of black magic by which some heavenly genie is expected to manipulate life to our desire, a kind of ecclesiastical Aladdin’s lamp that we rub and things are supposed to happen? I am afraid many have that concept of prayer.
- Or is it, as certain groups tell us, self-communion – a psychological form of talking to yourself in which you discover depths in your being that were there all the time, but you did not realize it until you prayed?
- All of these ideas of prayer are quite dissimilar to what is mentioned in Scripture. Paul here recognizes two categories of prayer, which he calls (1) all prayer, and (2) supplication. “All prayer” is the widest classification; “supplication” is the specific request that is made in prayer:

1. If you take the whole range of Bible teaching on this great subject of prayer you will find that underlying all the biblical presentation is the idea that prayer is conversation with God. This is all it is. Prayer is simply conversing with God. As

we understand the position of a Christian, a believer, he is in the family of God. Therefore, prayer is family talk. It is friendly, intimate, frank, unrestricted talking with God, and it is into this close and intimate relationship that every individual is brought by faith in Jesus Christ. By faith in Christ we pass out of the realm of being strangers to God and aliens to the family of God and into the intimate family circle of the children of God. It is easy to talk within a family circle, but think what harm is done to that intimacy if people refuse to talk. Prayer, basically then, is simply carrying on a conversation with God.

2. But supplication is asking some specific request. James says, “You have not because you ask not,” {cf, Jas 4:2 KJV}. In our conversation with God it is perfectly proper to ask, because we are children and he is a father. What the apostle is saying is, “After you have put on the armor of God, after you have thought through the implications of your faith in the ways which have been suggested previously, then talk to God about it. Tell him the whole thing. Tell him your reactions, tell him how you feel, describe your relationship to life around you and your reactions to them, and ask him for what you need.

Prayer is often considered to be so high and holy that it has to be carried on in some artificial language or tone of voice. You hear this so frequently from pulpits. Pastors adopt what has well been called a “stained glass voice,” and pray in some artificial manner as though God were far off in some distant corner of the universe.

Prayer is a simple conversation with the Father. It is what the apostle describes so beautifully in the Epistle to the Philippians:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication [there it is again] with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. {Phil 4:6-7 RSV}

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

1. First, worry about nothing. Be anxious for nothing. Christian friends, do you hear what that 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 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 has put it:

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 will dissolve fear is facts. Therefore, to put on the armor of God is to face the facts just as they are – not as they appear to be in the illusive picture that the world gives us, but squarely as they are. Therefore 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 says so! The hairs on our head are

numbered by him. Jesus was at great pains to show us that God is infinitely involved 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 circumstances, and which certainly does not arise out of a change of circumstances – which is simply inexplicable] will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Do you know anything more relevant in this troubled, anxious, fretful, weary, disturbed world?

Prayer reveals three facts:

1. 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 an invisible kingdom. It is not far off in space somewhere; it is right here. It surrounds us on every side. We are constantly in touch with it, though we do not always recognize it. It lies behind the facade of life, and all through the Scriptures are exhortations to take heed of this, reckon with it, deal with it, acknowledge that it exists.
2. The second fact prayer reveals is that we Christians have confidence that the kingdom of God is highly significant, that it affects our lives directly, that the visible things which are happening in our world are a direct result of something happening in the realm of invisibility. Therefore, if you want to change the visibilities, you must start with the invisibilities.
3. Third, and perhaps the fact most hotly contested by the devil and his forces, is that our prayers play a direct and 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 God in the world today. Without it he does not often work; with it he certainly does.

These three facts are all revealed in the matter of prayer.

But now we must immediately add that God answers prayer according to his promises. This is so necessary to say today, for there is a very vague and undefined but widespread concept that God answers any kind of prayer, that no matter what you want or how you ask for it, he commits himself to give it. This, of course, results frequently in disappointments and gives rise to the widespread belief that prayer is ineffectual. The truth is, 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 are free to 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 everything they want, anything they ask for. He makes it clear to them that he will do certain things and not do other things. In the realm of those limits, the father commits himself to answer his children's requests. So it is with 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! Here again is a great area of misunderstanding about prayer. Many take this phrase, "in the Spirit," as though it were descriptive of the emotions we should have when we pray. They think it is necessary to be greatly moved before prayer can be effectual, that we must pray with deep earnestness of words. Now, this is possible at times, but it is not essential or necessary to the effectiveness of prayer. And it is certainly not what is meant by this phrase, "in the Spirit."

To judge by the expression of many, one would perhaps feel that this phrase means to pray with a loud voice. 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 the character of God which the Spirit has made

known. This is praying in the Spirit. God has never promised to answer just any prayer, but he does promise to answer prayer in a way that he has carefully outlined for us. He does so invariably and without partiality. He is no respecter of persons in this matter of prayer. In the realm of our personal needs (those needs which call forth most of our prayers), the need for wisdom, perhaps, or power, or patience, or grace, or strength – in this realm God's promise, specifically and definitely, is to answer 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 said about it from other portions of Scripture. But I want to emphasize now that the apostle is saying we must take this matter of prayer seriously and learn what God has promised. In other words, master this subject as you would 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 trade; 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 serious about prayer, and that, through it, he makes his omnipotence and omniscience available to us in terms 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. And as you learn to pray in this way you find there is put at your disposal a tremendous weapon, a mighty power to influence your own life and the lives of others. The illustrations of this are far too numerous for me to dwell on, but they are unmistakable to those who experience them. Especially is this true in the realm of withstanding 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. No, there are others around us who are

weaker and younger in Christ than we are, and still others who are stronger than we, and we all are fighting this battle together. We cannot put on the armor of God for another person, but we can pray for that other person. We can call in reinforcements when we find him engaged in a struggle greater than he can handle for the moment, or perhaps for which he is not fully equipped, or if he has not yet learned how to handle his armor adequately. We are to be aware of other people's problems and pray for them, to open their eyes to danger and to help them realize how much is available to them in the armor God has given them, and to obtain specific help and strength for a specific trial.

Notice how Paul asks this for himself in this very passage. "Pray for me, that utterance may be give me in opening my mouth to proclaim the mystery of the gospel." This mighty apostle has a deep sense of his need for prayer. He says, "Pray that God may grant me boldness that I will be so confident of the truth of which I speak that no fear of man will ever dissuade me or turn me aside."

You find another notable example of the apostle's desire for prayer in the fifteenth chapter of Romans, in the last verses {cf, Rom 15:30-33}, where he asks the Christians to pray for three things specifically:

- Physical safety when he visits Jerusalem;
- A sensitive, tactful spirit when he speaks to the Christians there; and
- An ultimate opportunity to visit the city of Rome.

Three specific requests – and the record of Scripture is that each of them was answered exactly as Paul had asked.

I read through the prayers of Paul, and I find that he deals with many matters in his prayers. But, primarily, and repeatedly, one request comes out again and again: He prays for other Christians, that their spiritual understanding might be enlightened. He asks that the eyes of their mind, their intelligence, might be opened, unveiled. This repetition in the apostle's prayers indicates the importance of understanding intelligently what life is about, what is true and what is false, what is real and what is phony. It also illustrates the power of

the devil to blind and confuse, and to make things look one way when they are quite another. So the repeated prayer of the apostle is, "Lord, ... that their eyes may be opened, that their understanding may be enlightened, that their intelligence may be clarified, that they may see things as they are."

The prayer of another person can change the whole atmosphere of one person's life, oftentimes overnight. One Christmas Eve my family and I were in the Sierra Nevada at Twain Harte. When the sun went down the landscape around was sere and dry and barren. Brown leaves were swirling down from the trees; it was a typically bleak winter landscape. But when we awoke the next morning, it was to a wonderland of beauty. Every harsh line was softened, every blot was covered. Five inches of snow had fallen during the night, and – imperceptibly, quietly, softly, without noise – the whole landscape was marvelously transformed. We awoke to a fairyland of beauty and delight. I have seen this same thing happen in the life of an individual whose attitude toward God and reality was hard, stubborn. He was determined to have his own way. By virtue of prayer, secretly performed in a closet, that person's heart was softened, melted, mellowed and changed. His total outlook was different overnight.

Now it does not always happen overnight. Sometimes it takes much longer. Time is a factor which God alone controls, and he never suggests a time limit in his instructions about prayer. But he constantly calls us to this ministry of prayer, both for ourselves and for one another. When we learn to pray as God teaches us to pray, we release in our own lives and in the lives of others the immense, the enormous resources of God to strengthen the spirit and give inner stability and power to meet the pressures and problems of life.

I shall close with two passages on prayer. In Second Timothy 2, Verses 24-26, the apostle says to his son in the faith:

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. [Prayer is not specifically mentioned here but is certainly implied in these next words.] **God may 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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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 Ephesians:

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 spiritual hosts 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 this great struggle. It is a manifestation of this conflict in which we are engaged. As we look back upon a year that has ended, we have been aware of failure, of problems, of weakness, of obstinacy and stubbornness, of rebellion, and other things in our life of which we are not proud. These again have been manifestations of this great struggle in which we are engaged. We are looking forward now to a new year and we know it, too, will be 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 of God, 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 realizing what we are in Christ and what Christ is to us now, in very practical terms. "Put on the whole armor of God" is another way of saying what Paul says in Romans: "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God," {cf, Rom 5:11 KJV}.
- This is the glory of the Scriptures. They take the same truth and put it a dozen different ways in order that we might have various approaches to these great truths, and understand them clearly. As we obey what the apostle says, and think through the implications of our faith, we find that everything rests ultimately on that first piece of armor, which is Jesus Christ as the truth. Let us gird up our loins with the girdle of truth. All Christian faith relates to and derives from the authority of Jesus Christ. He is the truth. That is the first thing. We are to put on the whole armor of God.
- Second, he tells us we are to pray. Not merely put on the armor, but also pray. Not only to think about what Christ is and the great truths he reveals, but also to talk to God about them, to lean on his help, to hold conversation with

him, to engage ourselves directly and personally with the God who is our strength and our help.

Ever since Christmas I have seen several young people playing with a new toy. Frequently I have seen boys and sometimes girls with walkie-talkies, keeping in contact with a pal somewhere out of sight. This is one of the delightful things about the advancement science has brought to us, this ability to keep in constant communication with someone, if we care to. But it is nothing new. It is only what God has made available in Christ from the very beginning. We can talk to him and pray about all things.

But now we come to the third and last thing in the apostle's admonition to us in this passage. It is given to us in but one word, but a word which is repeated four different times throughout this entire passage. It is the word stand. Notice how it comes in here:

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ... Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, {Eph 6:11, 6:13-14a RSV}

Everything aims at this, that we might be able to stand.

What does it mean, "to stand"?

Well, imagine a football team defending its goal line. The defense lines up on the scrimmage line and simply stands, refusing to be moved. This is called a *goal-line stand*. This is exactly what this word pictures to us. We are to refuse to move from the ground of faith we have taken, refuse to yield ground, stand.

Now why does the apostle put it this way?

Why does he not say fight? Having done all, fight! Put on the whole armor of God and advance, charge. Why does he not use some military term that speaks of moving out? We must take these words seriously, for, after all, these are not play words used lightly as children would in playing games. These are serious commands given in a very serious fight. The apostle uses the word *stand* because it is the only proper word to use. It is the

only word which described the final attitude we must have to insure absolute victory.

As we look at this word more carefully, we can see that it touches on three aspects of the struggle of life:

First, the use of this word *stand* reveals to us the intensity of the struggle in which we are involved. We are told to stand because there are times when that is all we can do. The most we can possibly hope to achieve at times is that we should simply stand, unmoved. There are times in battle when a soldier can do no more than try to protect himself, and stay where he is. The intensity of the conflict becomes so furious, so fierce, there is nothing else he can do but simply hold his ground. That is what this word implies to us.

Paul has already spoken in this passage about evil days which come. Thank God, all of life does not consist of evil days, but evil days come. These are days when circumstances simply stagger us, when we face some combination of events, some disheartening tragedy or circumstance that almost knocks us off our feet and we can do nothing else but hope to stand where we are. There are times when doubts plague us. We are exposed to intellectual attacks and we find we have all we can do to assert any degree of faith at all. There are situations and circumstances into which we come when we are overwhelmed with fears and anxieties and we scarcely can keep our heads, because we are under pressure. There are times when indifference seems to sap our spiritual strength so much we lose all our vitality. It drains away our will to act, our motivation, and we seem 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 keenness of our spiritual life is gone. What are we to do then? Paul says we are to gird up our loins, put on the whole 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 final 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 certain predictions wrong. For instance, there is a passage in First Timothy 4 that refers to the latter times: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons," {1 Tim 4:1 RSV}. We read that as though it were a prediction of the closing moments of the age. But the "latter times" means the whole of the age, from our Lord's first coming until his second. 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 days.

But the Word also makes clear that these cycles become fiercer in intensity and more widespread in their impact as the age draws to its close. There is a growing awareness in our day that we live in a one-world community. 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 age goes on, these areas of trouble become more widespread. Now they are worldwide in their impact. Surely 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 away our relative security. It is an irresistibly rising tide, the lapping of whose waters we can already hear. Conditions are not getting better in our world, but worsening. Any honest person, facing world conditions, must admit 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 some degree, but they are not solving the problem. It is getting worse, because, as we have

seen all along, the issue never lies in these superficial, surface realms. It lies much deeper, in the hearts and souls of men under the domination of cruel and resistless power that dominates the world, whom Paul calls "the world rulers of this present darkness." Only the delivering strength of Jesus Christ is adequate to deal with them.

This is being confirmed to us from rather unexpected sources these days. Listen to this paragraph from a contemporary non-Christian writer:

"I remind you of what is happening in the great cities of the earth today: Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, London, Manchester, Paris, Tokyo, Hongkong, and the rest. These cities are for the most part vast pools of human misery, networks of raw human nerves exposed without benefit of illusion or hope to the new godless world wrought by industrial man. The people in these cities are lost. Some of them are so lost that they no longer even know it, and they are the real lost ones. They haunt the movies for distraction. They gamble. They depress their sensibilities with alcohol, or they seek strong sensations to dull their sense of a meaningless existence."

That is the world we are facing in 1966, and because of it, there are many who are faltering in their faith. This very week the newspapers in our area reported the resignation from the Christian ministry of a man who once 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 past year has witnessed a half-dozen outstanding Christian leaders who suffered moral collapse and have been laid 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 makes it 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 in order 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, to pray, and then stand. Perhaps you will realize that there is nothing else you can do, but that you can win if you 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 him at you with depression and discouragement, slander, disease. He doesn't waste time on the lukewarm bunch. He hits good and hard when a fellow is hitting him. You can always measure the weight of your blow by the one you get back. When you're on your back with fever and at your last ounce of strength, when some of your converts backslide, when you learn that your most promising inquirers are only fooling, when your mail gets held up, and some don't bother to answer your letters, is that the time to put on mourning? No, sir. That's the time to pull out all the stops and shout, Hallelujah! The old fellow's getting it in the neck and hitting back. Heaven is leaning over the battlements and watching. "Will he stick with it?" And as they see Who is with us, as they see the impossibility of failure, how disgusted and sad they must be when we run away. We're going to stand.

Stand: This is the Christian word.

There is a **second aspect** of the struggle indicated by this word *stand*. It indicates to us the character of the battle the Christian faces. We are to stand because this is a defensive action, primarily. The proper defense will win the day. I know this is oftentimes misunderstood, for we frequently hear the proverb, "The best defense is a good offense." But if a castle is under attack from an army, the battle is not won by those in the castle venturing forth to overwhelm the army outside. The battle is won by repelling all invasion. This is a picture of our Christian life. This is a defensive battle, not offensive. We are not out to take new ground; we are to defend that which is already ours. In the Christian battle the offensive work was done over 1900 years ago at the cross and the resurrection. The Lord Jesus is the only one who has the power and strength to take the offensive in

this great battle with the prince of darkness. But he has already done that. All that we possess as believers is already given to us. We do not fight for it. We do not battle to be saved, or fight to be justified, or forgiven, or accepted into the family of God. All these things are given to us. They were won by another, who, in the words of Paul in Colossians, "took principalities and powers and nailed them to his cross, triumphing over them in it" {cf, Col 2:14-15}, and led them captive who had held the world captive.

But we are to fight to use all this, to enjoy it, to experience it fully. The enemy is trying to keep us from realizing what we have and using it to the full. This is where the battle lines are. We do not need to take new ground as Christians. We cannot. All has been accomplished; all is given to us. As Jude says, in almost the last word of the New Testament, "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," {cf, Jude 1:3 RSV}. We are to hold on to that which God gives us and not let any of it be lost or taken from us, as to our use of it. This is what the phrase "contend earnestly for the faith" means. It does not mean to attack everyone who does not agree with you, and brand them as a Communist! It means to hold on to what God has already given you and utilize it to the full. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong," {1 Cor 16:13 KJV}. Do not surrender an inch of ground, even though others do.

"Well," someone says, "This is so negative, so defensive. I don't like to hear talk like this. It sounds as 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 delights to give this word stand. It is defensive action, but the amazing thing is that this kind of defensive actions becomes the greatest offense the Christian can mount. The fact is, the Christian who learns to stand, to give up no segment of his faith, but to put on the armor of God and to pray and thus be immovable, is the only Christian who in any way will reflect the love of Christ in the midst of unlovely situations. He is the only one who will be able to manifest peace and certainty and poise and assurance in the midst of a very troubled and unhappy world.

Christians who learn to stand make possible some degree of rest and enjoyment for the world.

We are “the salt of the earth” {Matt 5:13a}, Jesus said. Ah, but if the salt has lost its savor, what good is it? – “good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men!” {Matt 5:13c KJV}. This is, by and large, what the world is doing with the church these days – treading it under foot as worthless, useless. This is because we have not learned to stand. But when a Christian learns this, it is the very fact that he can stand when everyone else is falling that draws the attention of others and makes them seek his secret. I remind you again of those accurate words of Kipling, describing what manhood is:

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;

This is what makes people stop, look and listen, and say, “What is it that these people have? They don’t give way like we do, they don’t go along with the rest of the crowd. They seem to be able to resist these compelling pressures that we so easily give in to.”

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;

This is what manhood is. This is what God is after. This is what he wants to make us in Christ. But the battle is not to become this kind of a man, for this is the kind of man Christ makes us when we follow him. The battle is to show it, to reveal it, to manifest what we are and thus to refuse to believe the lies that keep us weak and make us act like an animal rather than a man. Put on the whole armor of God, all that Christ is, pray, and having done all, stand!

There is a **third aspect** of the struggle suggested by this word. It is the certainty of victory. If putting on the armor of God and prayer makes it possible to stand unmoved and immovable, then nothing more is required to win. After all, if a castle cannot be taken, the attacking army has nothing left to do but to withdraw. There is nothing else it can do. It is defeated, beaten. We have been talking a great deal in this series about the cleverness of Satan, his subtlety of attack, “the wiles of the

devil,” and the impossibility of defeating him by mere human wisdom. We have said that every saint in the record of Scripture, every believer throughout the history of time has been, at one time or another, defeated by the devil when he tried to match wits with him in his own strength. This is true. But it is also true that when any saint, any believer, even the newest and weakest, stands in the strength of Christ, puts on the whole armor of God, and, in dependence upon the presence of God in prayer, stands, the devil is always defeated.

This is because of a basic weakness, a fatal flaw, in the devil’s approach. When the believer stands on the ground of faith the devil always overreaches himself, he goes too far. This is because he commits himself to extremes, and in that lies his defeat. Sooner or later the reality which is truth must become apparent. The devil can never take the ground of truth because that, of course, would defeat his own aims. He cannot defend and support God, for he is out to attack and outwit him. Because God is truth, all that the devil can do is take the ground of untruth, of extremes, distortions, wrongness. Ultimately, because God is truth (and truth is always 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 prevail and reveal itself. This explains what we have referred to at times as “the phenomena of fashions in evil.” 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, it will come back in. If you are standing on the truth of God, there will be times when it will be regarded with utter scorn by the world and laughed at and you will be made a mockery of. But if you follow these foolish people who think they must adjust to every sweeping current of the time and try to maintain what they call

“intellectual respectability” at all times, you will find that as fast as you adjust, styles change and you are out of style again. But if you stand fast on what God has declared unchangeable, you will find a strange phenomenon happening: The very truths which ten years ago were looked down upon, and laughed at, and scorned by the world will suddenly come into fashion again, and will be held up as the newest discovery of the brilliant intellect of men. 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 even feel a little sorry for the devil, for it is his cruel fate continually to be defeated by the very weapons he tries to use 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 the plot suddenly changes. The villain is beaten by his own devices and he slinks off the stage muttering, “Curses! 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, the supreme moment of victory when all the powers of darkness were howling with glee as they saw the Son of God beaten and wounded, rejected and despised, hanging upon a cross, naked, before all the world. It looked like the triumph of darkness. Jesus said it was: “This is your hour,” he said, “and the power of darkness,” {Luke 22:53b}. But it was that very moment when the devil lost. In the cross all that the devil had risked was defeated, beaten down, and 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 tragedy. It is all the work of Satan. But that is not the whole of the story. God takes those very things – *those very things!* – and uses them to strengthen us and bless us, to teach us and enlarge us and fulfill us, if we stand. 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, obscure people who live in constant pain – who does not know what it means to be able to use his physical body in any way except in pain and suffering. But he writes this:

Loneliness is not a thing of itself, not an evil sent to rob us of the joys of life. Loneliness, loss, pain, sorrow, these are disciplines, God’s gifts to drive us to his very heart, to increase our sensitivities and understanding, to temper our spiritual lives so that they may become channels of his mercy to others and so bear fruit for his kingdom. But these disciplines must be seized upon and used, not thwarted. They must not be seen as excuses for living in the shadow of half-lives, but as messengers, however painful, to bring our souls into vital contact with the living God, that our lives may be filled to overflowing with himself in ways that may, perhaps, be impossible to those who know less of life’s darkness.

This is what it means to stand.

One of these days, the Bible says, the struggle will end. It will end for all of us at the end of our lives, but it can end before that in the coming of the Lord. Someday it will be over, there is no doubt. And someday it will be written of some, as it is recorded in the book of Revelation, “They overcame him [the great dragon, the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death,” {Rev 12:11}. The great issue of life is not how much money we make or how much favor we gather, how much of a name we make for ourselves. The great issue, above all, is whether it can be written of us as we come to the end, that we overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, for we loved not our lives unto death.

Prayer:

These are perilous days, our Father. We are made aware of this by our newspapers, and yet how false a view of life our newspapers give us. If we look at life from that point of view we will feel that life is wonderful and glorious, has no problems, and everyone is getting along fine, or we will be

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utterly cast down in defeat and disappointment with no hope. But thank you, Lord, that we do not get our view of life from the newspapers, but from your living

word, from the reality of it. Help us to believe it and obey it and thus to stand, undefeated and undefeatable. In Christ's name, Amen.

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