

Our Security In Christ

Victorious Living In Jesus Christ

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The following article is the Fifth in a series of Discussions on the subject of "Our Security In Christ".

What does Romans 7:24-8:1 reveal to the Christian concerning his security in Christ?

A Brand New Life In The Holy Spirit

*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore **now** [my bold] no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."*

There are those who think that Christianity is for sick folk, and old folk who are ready to depart this life — but nothing could be further from the truth. Anyone can yield to temptation, serve sin, be led about by the devil, and at the end of life's journey die and go to hell; but it takes a person of character, with determined will and "strong backbone," to say "No."

This Prince of Apostles urged young Timothy, his son in the ministry, to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2:3). Paul practiced what he preached. Near the end of his earthly life, as he sat in the death-house of a Roman prison, knowing that his execution could be but days — perhaps even hours — away, he wrote this soul-searching testimony to Timothy: "*I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day — and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing*" (II Tim. 4:6-8).

A devoted, dedicated apostle who many times hazarded his very life for the sake of the Gospel: ". . . *Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24).

The more Paul was persecuted, the more dedicated he became. The more he suffered, the more he served. He had two types of enemies, as do believers today: (1) *The powers of darkness* — wicked spirits, demons; and (2) the Christ-rejecting world, *though the powers of darkness worked in them*. He suffered many times and to great degree from both — from *without* he was attacked by enemies from the human standpoint, and from *within* he was attacked by the Satanic forces.

In II Corinthians 12:10 Paul said, ". . . *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

The Apostle Paul said, ". . . *In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the Word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*" (II Cor. 6:4-10).

The Christian life is a battlefield — not a picnic. Christians are on a pilgrimage — not a vacation. We are commanded to *"fight the good fight of faith."* Hear what Paul has to say about it in I Corinthians 4:9-16: *"...I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel. **Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.**"*

In II Corinthians 11:23-28 Paul gives a personal testimony of the persecution heaped upon him as a minister of the Gospel: *"...In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches!"*

The Apostle Paul said, *"...In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the Word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things"* (II Cor. 6:4-10).

Human Enemies

The greater percentage of his enemies came from the religious sects of that day – scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, rulers in the synagogue. Throughout his missionary journeys he was constantly under fire from this opposition. The enemies of the Gospel followed him as a hound follows a fox in the chase. No secret about the mistreatment he received at their hands in the cities where he preached the Gospel of grace – where he was often used of the Lord to establish local assemblies.

We are told that just after his conversion, he "straightway preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). This did not please the Jews, because they believed Jesus to have been a child of fornication, an illegitimate religious imposter. Just after Paul delivered his first sermon, the Jews in Damascus were so enraged that they took counsel to kill him, *"But their laying await was known of Saul. **And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.** Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket"* (Acts 9:23-25).

Paul spoke under the power of the Spirit when preaching in Jerusalem: *"He spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: **but they went about to slay him.** Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus"* (Acts 9:29, 30).

In Antioch, Paul had successful meetings among the Gentiles. They responded to his preaching of the glorious Gospel of grace, the good news that Jesus saves; but again, his own brethren the Jews attacked him: *"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas*

waxed bold, and said, *It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to YOU: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, **and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts**" (Acts 13:45-50).*

From there Paul traveled to Iconium where he again preached the message of Jesus Christ — the Son of God, crucified, buried, risen: *"But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the Word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, **and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled** unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the Gospel (Acts 14:2-7).*

But in the city of Lystra, the persecution by the Jews became even more severe: *"And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, **having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead**" (Acts 14:19).*

It is common belief among Bible scholars this was the time of Paul's experience as recorded in II Corinthians 12:1-4. They believe that the apostle actually was dead: but the saints who loved him so dearly gathered 'round him and prayed, and *God raised him from the dead.*

Paul's experience in Philippi: Lydia, a seller of purple, of the elite, was his first convert in Europe; after her conversion at the ladies' prayer-meeting where Paul preached the Gospel, she invited the men of God to abide in her house. Thus, Paul moved into the city, preaching Christ (Acts 16).

Under his preaching a fortune-teller was converted, and those who used this girl for greedy gain were very angry because they saw that their hope of gain was gone. **They had Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison**, securely locked in the inner cell, their feet fastened in stocks.

Though these men were locked in prison, they knew a Saviour who could not be locked out! At midnight, as Paul and Silas sang and praised God, the walls of the prison were rocked by a great earthquake. The prison doors were opened, chains were loosed, and prisoners were set free. What seemed to be a tragedy, God turned into a great victory. Revival broke out, a jailer was saved, together with his entire household! And from this nucleus, the church at Philippi was established.

In the flourishing city of Thessalonica the Jews became so angry at the message of grace as preached by the Apostle Paul that they turned the entire city into an uproar against him: *"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night, unto Berea . . ." (Acts 17:10).*

In spite of the great results of the Gospel Paul preached and many believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, *"when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, **and stirred up the people.** And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still" (Acts 17:13, 14).*

In the city of Athens, Paul again met with persecution. **He was mocked, and called a "babbler"**. After preaching his sermon on Mars' Hill, he "departed from among them" (Acts 17:17-33).

From Athens he moved into Corinth — and the Jews were ready for him. They hated him, they despised his message. They therefore **"made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat"** (Acts 18:12).

In the city of Ephesus, center of worship of the goddess Diana, *persecution was severe*. Paul's preaching of the Gospel had affected the income of the silversmiths and craftsmen who made silver shrines for Diana, and among them "there arose no small stir." The city was filled with confusion, the people were **"full of wrath" against the apostle**. Read the account in Acts 19 — the entire chapter.

After the episode in Ephesus, Paul returned to the city of Jerusalem, even though he well knew that further persecution awaited him there: *"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me"* (Acts 20:22, 23).

This Prince of Apostles clearly believed *"if God be for us, who can be against us?"* He did not turn aside or turn back when danger threatened. He believed in obeying God rather than man. It was he who proclaimed the blessed truth of Romans 8:28: *"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* So he moved into the city of Jerusalem and began his ministry, preaching Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified, buried, risen.

He preached in the temple, and the Jews, when they saw him in the temple, *"stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place . . . and all the city was moved and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple . . . and as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul"* (Acts 21:37- 32 – in part).

They then bound him with two chains, and even though they allowed him to give his testimony, that did not end his persecution. The Jews hated him so violently, and so determined were they to put an end to him, that more than forty Jews banded together, "and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul . . . And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him" (Acts 23:12-15).

But Paul's nephew heard of the plot, and made haste to report his findings to the apostle and in turn to the chief captain, who immediately summoned a heavy guard of soldiers, horsemen, and spearmen and under cover of night had Paul spirited away to Caesarea, where the governor commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall. You will find the account in Acts 23:16-35. It was here Paul made his confession and gave testimony before Festus, Felix, and Agrippa, his testimony of the experience he had with Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. So effective was his message at its close King Agrippa said, *"Almost thou persuaded ME to be a Christian!"* (Acts 26:28).

Since Paul was a Roman citizen, he had appealed to Caesar, and in response to that appeal he was ordered sent to Rome to appear before Caesar. He traveled by sea, and the twenty- seventh chapter of Acts gives the account of that journey, with its subsequent shipwreck and Paul's ministry on the island of Melita where he performed miracles of healing among the people there. (Read also Acts 28:1-10.)

Paul finally reached Rome, and "the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him" (Acts 28:16).

In Acts 28:30, 31 we read, "*And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him!*"

I know that all Scripture is inspired, verbally dictated to holy men of old who penned down the words the Holy Spirit gave them, but I am especially thankful that Paul could give us the tremendous words of Romans 8:35-39 — not only from inspiration, but from personal experience: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!*"

(I ask you: *Who, among ordinary men, could have been more qualified to utter those words? No wonder he said to the Philippians, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain!"*

The devil and hell have not produced — neither has the world manufactured — the power that can sever us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The truth set forth here was not only Paul's conviction — it was his experience as well. He had been tried, tested, attacked from all angles by all things. He knew that believers are not merely conquerors, but that we are *more than conquerors* — *through Him that loved us*.

Romans 8 is one of the most beloved chapters in all of the Word of God. It begins in Christ Jesus ("There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are IN Christ Jesus") and ends *in Christ Jesus* ("...nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*"), just as *saving faith* begins, continues, and climaxes in Jesus.

When Jesus tabernacled among men, preaching, healing, and teaching, He didn't promise His disciples an easy road. On the contrary. He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake ... and the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. . . Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:16-39 in part).

Jesus did not say, "Follow me — and I will give you a mansion to live in, I will put a big automobile in your garage, I will have all men speak well of you and give you a promotion every six months!" On the contrary, He promised trials, testings, persecutions, a cross to bear — and, for many, *martyrdom*.

Of Christ Paul said, "*For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*" (Heb. 2:10). In Hebrews 5:8 he said, "*Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things*

which He suffered."

If we fall victim to the world, the flesh, and the devil, we have no one to blame but ourselves. The Captain of our salvation overcame, and He *promised* us the power to overcome — He promised to make a way of escape for us. In his death He *conquered* death, hell, and the grave. Seated at the right hand of God the Father to make intercession for us, He now lives to die no more.

Victory is not cheap — it cost Jesus His life's blood. But there can be no conquest without conflict. There can be no victory without valor. We should be good soldiers of Jesus Christ — soldiers who refuse to retreat or yield ground. The hotter the battle, the more we should tighten our armor and wield the sword of the Spirit, determined to march on to victory! The life that counts for Christ is the life fully dedicated to Christ. From the standpoint of the world, it will be costly — but it will pay tremendous dividends in the world to come.

Spiritual Enemies

The devil's first desire is to damn the soul; but if an individual trusts Jesus unto salvation, thereby becoming a child of God, Satan does not give up. He simply marshals his forces and declares all-out war on the believer in an attempt to hinder his being a good soldier, a good runner, a good steward or servant of the Christ who saved him!

There will be Satanic conflicts. We will be called upon to battle the powers of darkness. Paul describes these Satanic enemies in Ephesians 6:10-18: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints!"

This battle is more deadly than between the Christian and his human enemies; it is in the realm of the invisible, supernatural foes. From becoming a believer until he is safe in the Paradise of God, his journey will be across a bloody battlefield, against powers mobilized by Satanic forces. Paul advises the Christian to put on the whole armor of God in order to be able to stand:

AGAINST the wiles of the devil;
AGAINST principalities;
AGAINST powers;
AGAINST the rulers of darkness;
AGAINST spiritual wickedness in high places.

This is no tangible enemy, he is not flesh and blood; but he is powerful, insidious, subtle, evil, more ingenious and much more to be feared than any human foe.

Paul refers to the devil in various terms, but always in a tone of warning: *"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices"* (II Cor. 2:11). In the Scripture in Ephesians, he speaks of *"the wiles of the devil."*

In II Timothy 2:26 he says, *"And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."*

In I Timothy 4:1, 2, he speaks of *"seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."*

II Timothy 3:13 says *"...Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."*

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ . . . For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel: for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11:3, 13-15).

In Ephesians 2:2 Paul refers to *"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."*

In II Thessalonians 2:8-10 he said, *"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."*

To the Thessalonians he wrote, *"Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" (I Thess. 2:18).*

To the Corinthian Christians he wrote, *"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (I Cor. 16:9).*

From these passages from God's Word we can agree that Satan and his cohorts are deceptive, subtle, destructive, and powerful — *but hear this* as Paul speaks of the Saviour: *" . . . YOU, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with HIM, having forgiven you all trespasses: blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2: 13-15).* Satan is still in operation, but his days are numbered; and one day Jesus will supervise putting him into the lake of fire.

But many believers tend to become careless. They know they are saved by grace and kept by the power of God, and they forget that Satan is more than an "influence." He is very real, and he never lets up, coming as a roaring lion, or an angel of light, as he chooses. He is always alert, seeking some way, some method, by which to cripple the testimony of the child of God.

Still other Christians give the devil *too much* credit. They live in constant fear that he will overtake them and cause them to stumble. They fail to realize they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and therefore greater is He who indwells them than he who is without. We should never minimize the power of Satan, but by like token we should never *magnify* his power.

The source of the Christian's strength is wholly (and ONLY) in the Lord. We are not strong within ourselves, but we are to remember that it is ours to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." HE won the victory over all the powers of hell, and IN HIM victory is ours!

Paul speaks of this power in Ephesians 1:18-23: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened;

that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, *and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:* And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

It is by the power which *His supreme might* imparts that we are made strong to resist the tempter — the same power that operated when Jesus broke the bonds of death and rose in victory! Our part is to abide in Him; we are strong only in the Lord, victorious so long as we are kept by His power. Union between Christ and the believer is a divine imperative if we are to claim the sure guarantee of victory. Moment by moment we are kept — not only IN HIM, but BY HIS POWER. "Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," the believer is secure.

You will note that we are told to put on the WHOLE armor of God, and the whole armor consists of the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the Gospel, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. With that, we are to take the sword of the Spirit, "which is the Word of God."

No armor is provided for the back! Sufficient equipment is provided to win the victory *so long as we face the enemy*. Soldiers in the army of the Lord must never turn their backs to the enemy. We must face him and fight him, always bearing in mind that Jesus is our Commander-in-Chief, and under His directions we will win the victory.

The Christian wears the girdle of truth, which is our perfect defense against Satan's lies. Jesus said to Thomas, "*I am the Truth.*" The devil is The Lie, and the father of lies. After the Rapture, God will send strong delusions and people will *believe* The Lie.

Satan is the author of all Bible error. He hates the truth, he wants to lead the child of God *away* from the truth, he mixes error with truth in order to divert the Christian from the truth and thus confuse him. The only way to shut the devil's mouth is *with* the Word of God: "...Thy Word is Truth" (John 17:17).

The believer wears the breastplate of righteousness — guaranteed protection against every subtle effort of the devil to debase us. Satan takes great joy in leading a believer to compromise, live an inconsistent life, dwell on the borderline of tolerance, and keep company with questionable friends. If he is successful, he hinders our effectiveness as stewards and soldiers, causing us to bring reproach upon the name of Jesus.

The Christian as a soldier needs good, efficient footwear. God furnishes every believer with the shoes of the Gospel of peace — the guarantee of victory in the race and in the battle: "*...How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things*" (Rom. 10:15).

The Christian wears the shield of faith — protection beyond penetration. It is our safeguard against every suggestion of unbelief on the part of Satan. His fiery darts cannot pierce it. Unbelief is the root of all sin. "The sin that doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1) is the sin of unbelief. They who come to God must believe that He IS, they who labor for God must labor in faith, for "whatsoever is NOT of faith is sin!" The just shall LIVE by faith, and faith is the victory that overcomes the world. No shot or shell from hell's cannons can pierce the shield of faith.

The Christian wears the helmet of salvation, which is our perfect, flawless covering against every storm of temptation that would sweep us into discouragement, or cause us to become depressed. He

who wears the helmet of salvation is watching, waiting, and praying for the return of our Lord. In such an attitude, the believer lives above the world, he lives in a sphere of the eternal. Our affections should be set on things above, and the more lightly we cling to earth, the tighter our grip on things eternal. IN CHRIST, *complete* victory lies ahead. We know not the day nor the hour, but we *do know* He is coming, and we are comforted in this assurance. Wearing the helmet of salvation we should always be looking "for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

God furnishes every believer with the sword of the Spirit — the Word of God — with which he can stop or destroy every enemy hell hurls at his soul! When Jesus was baptized of John in the river Jordan, the Spirit immediately led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (Mt 4:1-11). To every temptation Jesus answered Satan by saying, "**It is written . . .!**" Those words will put the devil to flight. He knows the Word of God is the sword that will defeat him in any battle.

Beloved, *if the devil could discredit the Word of God, he could undermine Christianity!* But the Word is forever settled in heaven, it cannot be destroyed by Satan, it cannot be corrupted. In this day, the devil is doing all in his power to discredit and undermine our faith in the Word of God. He attempts in every way possible to destroy the faith of the masses in the Bible as the inspired, holy, Word of God. But the Word of God will be standing when the world is on fire and Satan is in the pit!

The Lord Jesus Christ is our equipment: He is our light and our salvation — whom shall we fear? (Psalm 27:1). He is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). He is our righteousness (I Cor. 1:30). He is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

Paul outlines the Christian armor — piece by piece, and commands the believer to put on the whole armor — but at the climax of the passage he does not say that we are to be always fighting with courage, nor that we are to be always advancing; but he *does* say that we are to be "*praying always*, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18).

The apostle is quite sure of the invincibility of the armor which God furnishes for the believer. But he is equally sure we must keep in touch with God through prayer, communication and fellowship with Him, if the armor is as effective as it should be. Paul had much to say about prayer. The prayerless Christian is a defeated Christian. In I Thessalonians 5:17 we are urged to "pray without ceasing." But we must also *watch* as we pray. We must be alert and sober because our adversary the devil is always seeking some way to ensnare us. We must guard our conversation and our associations. We must be watchful in our interests, in our social activities, in business, in whatsoever we do. Jesus said, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation," and if Jesus warned concerning prayer as a safeguard against temptation, we should certainly hear His words of admonition and obey.

The Prodigal Son

The Christian is faced with extreme trials and persecution today. There are many who are in a struggling situation, not knowing or even understanding what's over the dark horizon...for them. Because our Father in Heaven is so loving and compassionate, He loves to forgive us of our sin — when He knows our hearts are tender — and the sin was not pre-empted by planning. When we are surprised and in shock at the first recognition of making a mistake, whether it be unbelief, carnality, promiscuous activity — doesn't matter. When the Lord sees our heart to be in a repentant mode with tears and weeping because of an unaware attack of the enemy, He sends to us His forgiveness on a golden platter — even before we ask.

I believe the prodigal came home because of his history with his father. This young man knew his father's character — and apparently he had received great love from him. Otherwise, why would he

return to a man who would have been angry and vengeful – one who would beat him and make him pay every cent he squandered back? He must have known if he returned he wouldn't be upbraided or condemned for his sins. He probably thought, "I know my father loves me. He won't throw my sin in my face. He will take me back." When you have that kind of history, you can always go back home.

Notice how the prodigal's father presented him with the blessings of goodness. The young man was intent on offering a heartfelt confession to his dad, because scripture tells us he rehearsed it all the way home. Yet when he faced his father, he didn't get a chance to fully confess. His father interrupted him by running up to him and embracing him. The Bible says, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The father was so happy his son was back, he covered him with kisses, saying, "I love you, son. Come home with me now and be restored."

The prodigal's father did all of this before his son could complete his confession. The young man was only able to blurt out the beginning of his speech, saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (verse 21). But his dad didn't wait for him to finish. To him, the young man's sin had already been settled. The father's only response was to issue an order to his servants: "Put a robe on my son and rings on his fingers. Prepare a feast, because we're going to celebrate. Everyone rejoice — my son is home."

At what point was the prodigal forgiven? He was forgiven back when he was still groveling for food in the pigpen. His sin was wiped away the moment he first thought, "I'm going back home. I've got to confess to my father that I've sinned." He was forgiven by his father before he could even voice his confession — before he could do penance, weep tears of grief or try to pay him back. And his father showered him with blessings of goodness way ahead of schedule.

Sin wasn't the issue to this father. The issue in his mind was love. He wanted his boy to know he was accepted, even before he could utter a confession. And that is the point God wants to make to us all: His love is greater than all of our sins. "*The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance*" (Rom. 2:4).

Of course, it is possible to "(despise) the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance" (same verse). Those who think they can continue in sin, testing God's grace over and over, become hardened by their repetitious sinning. They believe they can continue to sin against his goodness without being harmed. But gradually, their hearts become impenitent, so that they no longer desire to repent. They end up with hardened hearts, storing up wrath against themselves. They can't blame God; he has faithfully tried to prevent them with blessings of goodness — yet they have rejected it all. That is the greatest sin anyone can commit.

Here's the way to cleansing and restoration: By receiving the Lord's covenant promise: "I will cause you to walk in my ways. I will plant my fear in your heart. I know you can't do this for yourself But don't worry – I will do it all for you, with your cooperation. This work is accomplished only by faith in the finished work of the cross. All I ask is that you trust my promises to you. The work has already been accomplished by me. It's your work to accept it by faith. That is my everlasting covenant.

Many blessings!

Tom Stephens

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