

## **Coping with the Enemy**

***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world”*** (I Peter 5:8,9).

Life on the earth is a warfare. As in a regular battle, we must take the measure of the enemy. To fail to do so puts the warrior at great risk. There is nothing that Satan likes better than to hear people call in question his existence or his power or the reality of his continual attacks upon the believers. He is quite delighted when he hears people brand as “paranoid” those who take seriously his opposition to them. It is not, of course, that everything that happens to us of a negative nature is from Satan, or that Satan himself is personally engaged in attacks upon individuals. He has his large number of demon spirits, as God has his angels. The demonic “mischief” in the world is just as real as the angelic benevolence.

**But who or what is Satan? And how do we cope with him?** We can only summarize here. If one wants a fuller discussion, one may write for the author’s pamphlet—The Great War. There are some things that we know with a degree of certainty. For one thing, Satan is a created being. He was obviously in existence long before Adam and Eve emerged in the Garden of Eden. Passages that give us considerable detail are found in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. While the references seem to indicate earthly kings, the descriptions take us far beyond the human scene. According to these passages, Satan is called Lucifer (“light-bearer”) and had great beauty and excellence. He was a veritable walking “orchestra” and had great power. As the result of an avaricious attempt to usurp greater power, he was cast out of God’s realm into the earthly sphere, with all of his cohorts. Here he had his encounter with the unfortunate pair in the Garden of Eden. From that day to this, Satan’s obsessive purpose has been to hold God’s creatures hostage and frustrate God’s eternal purposes for them. Thus the warfare with which we humans are inevitably entangled. But, what are Satan’s chances of success? What is our hope? What power do we have to fight Satan? What are our weapons?

**What chance does Satan have for success?** According to the express statements of Scripture—none whatsoever. According to the book of Revelation, Satan will ultimately be cast into the bottomless pit, together with his hosts. But meanwhile, he has certain powers on the earth that allow him to make trouble for the saints. Why is that? We can only speculate. Somehow the triumph of the saints (and they will be triumphant) does redound to the glory of God. But, for now, we must remain, as Paul indicates with obscure vision: “Now we see through the glass darkly.”

Paul fought a continuous battle with Satan. And at one point expressed it as his perpetual “thorn in the flesh”—“a messenger of Satan,” which was sent “to buffet him.” Notice that it was a “messenger” and not a particular set of circumstances. Apparently it was something of a demon presence which, like a thorn in the finger, caused continual distress and stubbornly resisted removal. In spite of Paul’s persistent prayers, God elected not to eject Paul’s tormentor,

but rather to give him the grace to endure. The most distressing thing to Paul seemed to be the hindrance of the work. To the Thessalonians he said, "Once and again we would have come to you, but Satan hindered us." Why would God allow Satan to hinder the work?

The best answer is, "I don't know." Speculating about it, one might assume that the cultivating of the worker, molded by adversity, is more important to God than the work itself. But that is only speculation. In terms of Satan's ability to cause problems for God's people in general, we are given the clue in Romans 5 that "*affliction works patience, and patience experience and experience hope [expectation] and hope maketh not ashamed [makes us not without strength].*" So there is somehow a process of spiritual cultivation taking place in this conflict between Satan and the people of God. We conclude then that Satan is allowed to attack us, but God provides the grace to withstand him. The understanding of this conflict must be left until our ultimate glorification when, "*We shall know even as we are known.*"

**How then do we cope with Satan?** In the first place we must realize that we humans are no match for Satan. If we try to handle him in the flesh—that is with human resolve or human religious exercise—we shall surely be defeated. (Of course, this defeat is in the flesh and not in the spirit). There is an unfortunate tendency in many quarters of the Church to presume that the more one displays fervency and perseverance in religious exercise, the greater will be one's victory over Satan. This is a totally misleading concept. It implies that we must somehow prove to God our fervency before he will act on our behalf. It brings us back again to the assumption that in order to get God's help we must first overcome human weakness. But God said to Paul, "*My strength is made perfect is weak-ness.*" Jesus admitted that the "*spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*" It was the very weakness and inadequacy of the flesh that made it necessary for Christ to come to earth and die for His creatures. If we had strength in the flesh to fight Satan, then Christ would not have had to come and die. But if our strength is from the Spirit, then we must rely on the grace and power of God to defeat Satan.

**What are the instructions?** In this area the Bible is quite specific. Peter says, "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you." The word "resist" simply means to "stand against." Paul tells the Ephesians to put on the armor of God that they may "stand against" Satan. And he adds, "and having done all, to stand." So our task is simply to stand. It is not for us to drive him back. Standing against Satan means that we simply stay put. If Satan is troubling you at the present time, remember it is God who must drive Him back; you must simply stand fast. And the grace of God is offered to us to help us stand. The proof that God has been true to His word and given us such grace is that we are still, in spite of all the buffeting, staying with Christ. The proof that we have stood fast is not that we have been rejoicing in our afflictions, but rather that we still care about Christ.

It is good for Christians to rejoice in the time of trouble, but not a condition of salvation. Nor have we that much control over our emotions. We always hope to control our emotions, but we can never use them as a gauge of our victory in Christ. The victory is that we stay true to Him and not that we always feel good

about things. Many Christians are defeated in this area. They think that because they have been distressed or depressed or unhappy in their trials, that they have not been victorious. That is simply not so. The word “patience,” which emerges in connection with afflictions means simply “to remain under.” The strength of concrete, for example, is determined not only by how much load it will bear, but for how long. That one still cares about Christ in spite of afflictions is the proof of one’s patience—“remaining under the load.”

The next instruction is “to put on the whole armor of God.” At the outset we must understand that each of the pieces of armor identified by Paul is, in reality, an attribute of Christ who dwells in us. Thus, to put on Christ is to put on the whole armor of God. Paul describes this armor in Ephesians 6:10-17.

1). **“The girdle of truth.”** Christ says, “I am the truth.” The Greek word for truth means “genuineness” or “reality.” Satan is the master of illusion. When we have Christ within, we have the essence of what is real in the universe. But that quality of truth is in the spirit and not in the flesh. That is, the human mind is not always capable of articulating the truth which we have in our spirits. Thus, though Christians do have Christ dwelling within and so possess the truth, they are not always able to be in harmony, because of the limitations of the mind in understanding and articulating the truth.

2). **“The breastplate of righteousness.”** Paul says to the Corinthians, “Christ is our righteousness.” The Greek word here does not mean “piety,” but “rightness” or “justification.” Our justification is in Christ and not in our pious deeds. Satan accuses us, to rob us of this truth.

3). **“Feet shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.”** Again, Christ is our peace. The glad tidings of the peace of Christ are like shoes for our feet. It prepares us to trod the rugged pathway of life. Although Isaiah speaks of the “feet upon the mountain” that bring good tidings of peace,” and Paul quotes him in Romans 10, we are not dealing here, as some have supposed, with the “feet” of the evangelist, but with the preparedness for the journey—a preparedness that is the gift of every believer through the peace of Christ within.

4). **“The shield of faith.”** Once again, we have faith through the presence of Christ within us. Paul says that the *“life which we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God . . .”* We must distinguish between faith that is of the mind or the flesh and faith that is of Christ. The faith of Christ is an energy flow within us giving us a spirit-nature and an identity with Christ. Faith that is of the mind is merely a matter of human confidence, which is very unreliable and often misplaced. So here, too, we have the presence of Christ within us protecting our spirits with the shield of His faith.

5). **“The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”** We know Christ to be the Word of God as the Logos. “In the beginning was the Word [Logos].” But this is a different word here—*rema*—more of the individual phonetic unit rather than the broader revelational concept of Logos. As the Logos, Christ is the ultimate revelation of God. *Rema* means more of the individual word spoken. The expression—“sword of the Spirit”—really has to do with the idea of

the Holy Spirit speaking through us on individual occasions, rather than with the Bible as a whole. That word could be a Scripture text brought to mind, or it could be some thought that the Holy Spirit inspires in us in the particular circumstance. Again, it is something of the Spirit of Christ within us and not something of human reasoning or wisdom.

So putting on the armor of God is not a piece-by-piece application as some sort of religious exercise, but rather it is the taking of Christ into our spirits in the first place and recognizing that these are the weapons that we have in Christ. Knowing that Christ is within removes the anxiety of being overcome, even though feelings may still exist as natural responses to affliction. Coping with Satan is not a specialized exercise depending on a high degree of spirituality. It is the privilege of every believer to have Christ as the Great Defender. And, it is our very weakness that secures for us His strength.

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*Next month "Part II—The Thorn in the Flesh"*  
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