

## **Coping with the Enemy** **Part V—Concluding Comments**

***“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”*** (Romans 8:38,39).

The subject of Satan is of crucial importance to every believer. In one way or another he affects everyone’s life in the world, Christian or non-Christian. He is the source of all evil—all sin and misery; all conflict and chaos; all catastrophes and tragedies. The Christian needs to know and wants to know just how far Satan can go in affecting the life of the believer and how do we cope with him? We have discussed the subject at length in four preceding articles, but it seemed good to give some further, concluding comments.

Many believers are fearful, if not terrorized, by the thought of “demon possession.” The word that troubles many is the Greek word *daimonidzomai*. There is a considerable debate as to whether the word means actually possessed by a demon or merely affected or afflicted by a demon. The truth of the matter is that the word does not occur outside of the gospels and is certainly never applied to the believers after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is hard to say exactly what might have been the condition of those from whom Jesus cast out demons—whether or not they were faithful Jews—but certainly they did not possess the Holy Spirit within. In a previous article we made the statement that Satan can never possess one who is possessed by the Spirit of Christ. The more I study the Scriptures, the more convinced I am of the truth of that statement. There is no question about the power of Satan to affect believers in one way or another. They are tempted by him and afflicted by him and badgered by him, as was the apostle Paul, but never referred to as “possessed” by him, nor is the word *daimonidzomai* ever applied to them.

None of the above comments are meant in any way to deny the reality of Satan or to underestimate his power. There is no question but what he is able to bring affliction upon the believers, even to the point of sickness, and, of course, by the same token, to affect the mind in ways that physical distress can affect it. But what is the believer’s response to these things? Both Peter and James are convinced of the effectiveness of resistance. Peter, referring to “our adversary the devil,” says, “*Whom resist, steadfast in the faith . . .*” (I Peter 5:9). James says, “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you . . .*” (4:7). Both of them use the Greek word *antistemi*—“to stand against.” Peter speaks of putting on the whole armor of God (see August 1988 issue), and then concludes by saying “and having done all, to stand.” James adds the phrase “steadfast in the faith.” There is no way we can stand in human strength. We are certainly no match for Satan. But how can we muster up faith when we are fearful and weak? The answer lies in faith as a gift of God and not faith as human confidence. Paul, who ought to know, finds his strength in Christ, and not in himself. “*When I am weak then am I strong.*” He was not going in his own human confidence—he had “no confidence in the flesh”—but in the actual faith of Christ, which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). So faith is not something we work up by religious effort, but something that is a gift of God and cannot be duplicated by any human

activity, however fervent and pious. But of course, none of us is ever worthy of that gift so the effort to prove ourselves worthy before we can successfully engage the enemy, is futile.

So the fundamental principle in coping with Satan is simply to stand fast. We don't do battle with him—we let Christ do that. What we need is the grace to stand and that we have in abundance. We may not feel good about it, but we will survive, because Satan is no match for Christ. We are never told that we have to feel victorious, as many seem to imply, or that we can rely on any human emotions in the midst of the conflict. In the midst of one of Paul's conflicts (II Corinthians 7:5) he said, "*Without were fightings and within were fears.*" But his fears did not stop him from going on. So the rule is—**just stay put**. The worst time to make a decision or a change is when things are going badly. Then you'll never know whether or not you were fleeing from the enemy.

A very important word here is the problem of Satan's attacks on those around us. It is quite possible that Satan may afflict someone we love, not for their sakes, but for ours. He hopes thereby to discourage us and to cause us to doubt our effectiveness with Christ. When a loved one is affected, the believer often engages in great religious exercise and much agony, believing that the reason the prayers are not answered is because of one's own inadequacy. You can forget that, because we are never worthy enough or effective enough or faithful enough in the flesh to accomplish anything. But why should someone else have to suffer for us? Remember, "*Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps*" (I Peter 2:21). It is, of course, much harder to watch a loved one suffer than for us to suffer ourselves. So Satan may sometimes try to get at us through those that are near to us. But Christ will give them the grace, as well as ourselves. We often wonder how others can bear the circumstances of their lives and yet we must realize that God does not give us the grace to think about it. He will give others the grace to bear their trials, but He does not give us the grace to put ourselves in their place.

There are, of course, many things that we do not understand about the workings of Satan or the way the Lord handles him. It is not for us to understand but to "stand under." As one has often remarked, Jesus chided the disciples for lack of faith when they demanded that he still the storm. True faith would have been evidenced by their staying in the storm. **As long as Christ is in the boat, it will not sink.**

Throughout the millennia of human history, Satan has done his best to destroy the work of God. One way that he does this is to attack the saints with the hope that he can separate them from Christ. In this effort he has a great many tools. Perhaps his most effective ones are guilt and discouragement. If he can get the saints to believe that their prayers are unanswered because they are not good enough or worthy enough or fervent enough, or whatever, he hopes then to cause them to withdraw from Christ in discouragement or drown in a river of guilt or to give way to doubts and accusations. One way that he does this is to tempt them with goals and purposes that are not of God. It is not always of God's will, for example, as Paul found out, to allay the afflictions of Satan. Another way is to encourage the classifying of people as demon-possessed or "demonized." Failure to handle this situation, which is an illusion from Satan anyway, produces guilt and doubt in the believer. And so with all afflictions

that we may wish to alleviate. He may fail to recognize that God has His reasons for continuing the trial. Both Job and Paul are classic examples of this concept.

So in the end, it is not ours to classify the satanic thrusts, nor to determine what God's purposes are, nor to pressure God to respond by attempting to prove our worthiness or faith or fervency. It is ours to turn the matter over to Christ and stay put. Disregard all human notions and emotions religious or otherwise, and trust Christ to deal with the situation in His own way and in His own time. Remember that even if one is overwhelmed by feelings of doubt and distress and discouragement, the presence of Christ will provide the needed faith whether our minds participate or not.

Many times people have expressed great confidence that the Lord was going to undertake in a given matter, only to be disappointed in the end, when it turns out that that is not what God wants to do at all. Satan loves to see this kind of fleshly illusion, because it causes people to doubt either Christ or themselves or both. It is better merely to pray for a matter and leave it to the Lord to determine what He wants to do, because human reactions can be very illusory.

Again I say—in the crucible of Satan, **stay put!** Trust not your own reactions or the reactions of anyone else, however convinced they may be of what God is going to do. Put not your trust in yourself—your faith or your piety or your prognosis—trust rather in Christ, ***“For He hath said I will never leave thee or forsake thee”*** (Hebrews 13:5).

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