

## The Body and the Shield of Faith

***“Unto an inheritance incorruptible and unspotted and unfading, kept [treasured up] in heaven for you who are kept [guarded] by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed at the last time . . .”*** (I Peter 1:4,5)

We have been reborn unto a living expectation. As such we are joint heirs with Christ of all that God is and has and are partakers of His very nature. The Greek word for inheritance—κληρονομία (*kleronomia*)—means literally “a legal portion.” As with Christ, of whom it was said that all things had not as yet been “put under His feet,” we have only received a portion of our inheritance. There is much more to come. For this reason we must be careful about assuming that since all things belong to God, we are entitled to whatever we want “as long as we have the faith.” This is an extremely misleading concept, but, unfortunately, rather common among the believers. The truth of the matter is that our portion on earth today is whatever God wishes it to be for His own purposes.

Thus, Paul regarded himself as impoverished as far as the earth is concerned, and yet ultimately to be glorified along with Christ. “*As poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things*” (II Corinthians 6:10). Such were his earthly miseries that he considered himself “of all men most miserable,” should it be that Christ had not risen from the dead. He was not really complaining, but only making the point that all of his privations were entered into as of no consequence compared to the ultimate glory that he would have with Christ. For many believers, life on the earth has been hard, and their suffering relentless. But such also was the lot of many in the early Church, as well as down through the centuries where martyrdom and misery had been rampant.

It was true, also, of many of the so-called “heroes of faith” in the Old Testament times. To say that their earthly wretchedness could have been alleviated if only their faith had been strong enough, would not only be an idiotic observation, but most cruel to the sufferers. If one were to refer to the Old Testament as support for the guarantee of earthly benefits, let it be understood that in the Old Testament, where the believers did not possess the Spirit within, the evidence of God’s presence was felt in earthly welfare. This, of course, is a broad generalization. There were many of God’s prophets and people that did suffer for particular purposes that God had in mind.

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the entire basis of our relationship to God was changed. Now He would dwell within us in the presence of His Holy Spirit and the focus of our lives would be the realm of the spirit rather than of the flesh. Whether or not one would have earthly benefits was secondary. Far from encouraging believers to seek for earthly benefits, Paul said, “*Though our outward man perish, yet is our inward man renewed day by day.*” He followed this with the classic statement—“*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; though we focus not on the things that are seen, but on the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal*” (II Corinthians 4:16,17).

So then what is our portion or inheritance? Our portion is that we share with God in His Spirit nature. We have been transformed into His image. *“We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory, to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (II Corinthians 3:18). And John says in his first Epistle, *“Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. We know that when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is”* (I John 3:2). That is our irrevocable portion, but to have a “nice” life on the earth is not at all assured. Nor do we have to wait until we reach our place with God in eternity to participate in this portion of our inheritance. We are, in fact, eternal now, as far as our spirits are concerned. We are now in possession of the very nature of God which makes it possible for us to unite with Him for eternity. The difference is that we are now burdened with the flesh which has not as yet been glorified. On the other hand, the earthly sojourn, difficult as it may be, is alleviated by the reality of the Spirit of Christ within us. And thus Paul says to the Colossians, *“Set your affections [mind-set] on things above and not on things on the earth. For you have died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God”* (3:2,3). The temporal things of this earth can indeed affect us—physically, mentally, emotionally—and give us trouble in the flesh. Nor are we always guarded against such temporal phenomena. But Paul makes the point that since it is true that our real life is in the spirit, we can save ourselves much distress by diminishing our expectations for earthly bliss. The constant focus on “getting things from God” confuses this issue.

But then what guarantee is there for our spirits? The guarantee is the power of God and the “shield of faith.” As we have learned, our inheritance is kept as a treasure for us and we are guarded for the treasure. Our security is guaranteed by the power of God, whose energy sustains the universe. And this power is available to us through faith.

*But then are we responsible to maintain our own faith in God in order to be preserved?*

By no means. *“Faith is not of ourselves, but it is a gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8). Nor does it have anything to do with human feelings of confidence or trust. It is an energy process from God, as we have often said. The moment we take Christ into our spirits, we are imbued with His energy. *“And what is the surpassing majesty of His power in us who believe, according to the energy of the might of His strengths, with which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead . . .”* (Ephesians 1:19,20). That energy is not affected by the human emotional or intellectual faculties, which are of the flesh. Otherwise, we are still hostage to human impotence.

In Ephesians 6, Paul discusses the “armor of God.” Notice in the first place, it is the armor of God and not our armor, borrowed from God. In the second place, it is well to note that every item in the so-called “armor” is ours in the presence of Christ. Christ is our truth [reality]; our righteousness; our faith; our peace; our salvation; and our sword.

So what then is the “shield of faith?” It is not some humanly devised feelings of confidence hastily fabricated in the face of the satanic attack; it is rather the energy of God surrounding our spirits by His power and making us invulnerable to Satan. If it were based on our own human feelings and commitments, we

would be constantly vulnerable to Satan with the vacillating of our moods and commitments. We would be readily vulnerable to Satan and our shield would be nothing more than a sieve. But if you can imagine the shield of faith as an electronic shield, much like an electric eye, then you can imagine the energy of God continually surrounding us and our security based upon the power of God and not the constancy of our human religious capacities. So Paul was not dependent on his own strength, but on the grace of God, whose “*strength is made perfect in weakness.*”

But how then does Satan attack us? He attacks our flesh. He can't get at our spirits, but he can give us trouble in the flesh. We live in a world that is under his dominion. The forces that have corrupted and ravaged the earth do affect us. Christians are not preserved always from catastrophes and disasters. God does not always protect us from these things, but sustains us in them. He exercises His own discretion as to when and where to give His help. But the facts of history have indicated that Christians have often gone through very, very difficult times. The miracle of God is not that we never suffer, but that we have His grace and strength to sustain us in the midst of trouble. We are continually tested, not to see **if** we will stand, but to prove **that** we will stand, because Christ will make us stand (Romans 14:4).

So then we are kept by the power of God through the faith of Christ, which is an energy process from God, surrounding us like a shield and making our spirits completely invulnerable to Satan. Even though we may have our struggles in the flesh, remember that the struggle in the flesh is temporary and the energy of Christ in our spirits is forever.

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