

UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

by

'Tobi Moses Sotanmide

ISBN 978-978-54722-5-7

Copyright 2018 by 'Tobi Moses Sotanmide
All Rights Reserved

Published by

Narrow Way Media and Publication
Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
+234 816 284 8242 +234 805 913 3185
narrowwaymedia@gmail.com

DEDICATION

To God the Only Wise

And

To all who call upon the name of the Lord

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction **4**

Groundwork **8**

Before Man Sinned **21**

In the World but not of the World **33**

Often Troubled **40**

The Warfare **51**

The Nature of Prayer **89**

On the Course of this World **107**

INTRODUCTION

TRUTH IN LOVE

*Practicing the truth in love,
We will in all things grow up into Christ,
Who is the head (Eph.4:15)*

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! (Rm.3:27)

*For who concedes you any superiority?
What do you have that you did not receive?
And if you received it, why do you boast as if you did
not? (1Cor.4:7)*

*No one can receive anything
Unless it has been given to him from heaven (Jn.3:27)*

*Just as each one has received a gift,
Use it to serve one another
As good stewards of the manifold grace of God
(1Pet.4:10)*

*I speak as to thoughtful people;
Judge for yourselves what I say (1Cor.10:15)*

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Are you in bondage to sin and Satan? Do the world and its evil system plague your heart with lusts? Is your path threatened with fear and ruin? Does all hope seem lost?

Jesus Christ the Son of God calls to you gently today, however the echo may reach your fainting heart, do not delay.

The world is a dreary desert; you are *lost* in its vast wasteland of sinfulness. You bend feebly on your aching limb, unshielded under its fiery firmaments, and there is leanness in your soul. You are undone!

Come to Jesus, the Rock of Ages, His water *runs in dry places like a river* (Ps.105:41). Come to Christ, the Well of Life, drink your fill and thirst no more. He shall fill your cup, and you shall become a fountain (Jh.4:14). *Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful* (Joel 2:13). Confess your sins! Cry aloud! Spare not! Wipe His gracious feet with your tears. Repent, repent indeed; repent of your sins. You will be converted, and your sins will be blotted out (Acts 3:19). *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved* (Acts 16:31). *For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* (Rm.10:10).

What about you friend? Have you sought other grounds for help and ease? Has your heart been led astray by vain promises of the great enemy's beguiling voice? Are you soon turned out of the way?

You will be stricken again! If you *turn away from Him who speaks from heaven* (Heb.12:25) - the true Shepherd of your soul, you will be stricken again! Ravenous wolves lurk yonder; your wounds will not be few! If the Lord does not uphold your steps in His paths, your footsteps will surely slip. The paths of the destroyer are slippery grounds, they are enchanted broadways. They are ways that always seem right unto those whose feet are trapped within them; they are ways of death (Prov.14:12). They are sinking grounds. You will roll about in the swamp of your self-gratification; you will sink fast in the mire of your grief. The peace you are promised will soon slip away; you will grab the wind. Yes, such painful realities await those who turn out of the way of truth and life.

Return today, sons and daughters alike, return to the Lord. Repent of your sins and forsake them. *You will find rest for your soul* (Mt.11:28-29).

1

GROUNDWORK

GROUNDWORK

That which is born of the flesh is flesh;

And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (Jn.3:6).

Only the truth can set free from falsehood. Only the truth can drain the poison of deceit. Only truth can expose the schemes of darkness.

May the good Lord grant us all broken hearts and contrite spirits. May our wounds be healed, and our souls restored in truth for His name sake.

Now, a genuine and Christ-like faith cannot be invented. This is a fundamental truth. There is no way around it. Either we embrace and uphold this truth, or we despise and suppress it in unrighteousness.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (Jn.3:6). That is why the arm of flesh can never perform the works of the Spirit. The principles of human traditions and religions do not express the will of God. No matter how seemingly sincere and virtuous, the best of man's reforms and organized beliefs cannot produce true spiritual virtues of the kingdom of heaven. Mere moral improvements are not the same as true inner transformation by the word of God and the Holy Spirit.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (Jn.3:6). Genuine consecration cannot be achieved through unholy means. A

proud appearance of knowledge can never attain the truth and purity of divine wisdom. A show of false humility only confirms the rottenness in its source. Only the Spirit of truth can birth that which is truly spiritual and lasting.

But observe. The groundwork of repentance from dead works and faith towards God has worn away in mainstream Christianity. Many consciences have not been purged from dead works to serve the living God!

Many sincere believers in the Lord Jesus have been deceived by popular opinions. Cultural and religious standards of men have been accepted as God's precepts. In her ignorant zeal, conventional Christianity has merged the two unrelated elements of flesh and Spirit, creating abominable counterfeits of that which is of God and His truth.

But a Christianity that derives more from traditional beliefs and cultural presuppositions than from the word of God is sheer deception! And only a few are aware of this spiritual drawback. In thoughts, words, and actions, most Christians are guided more by their cultural values rather than by the word of God. An unholy blend has come to be accepted as true, binding, and "normal".

This is great error!

Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God (Mt.22:23).

Thus at the root of various misunderstanding in mainstream Christianity lies the lack of proper understanding of who God is as revealed in His word.

This is the faulty foundation of this deception!

Within the esteemed walls of various religious gatherings, on adopted prayer mountains and hills faraway, in homes and places of occupations, many have learned to seek for self, and not for the will of the Lord.

Positive Confessions of breakthroughs, violent prayers against perceived enemies, and unrestrained desires for personal riches are the common details of most lives and gatherings in Christendom. This is the popular mentality, though we may deny it!

THE PITFALLS

So many things have gone wrong with professing Christianity, and those errors are the outgrowth of wrong beliefs. Good conscience and sincere faith are the fruits of sound instructions (1Tim.1:5). But whenever there is famine of God's word, many lies will be accepted as truth. This is why there is so much confusion and misconceptions in today's Christianity.

How true are our religious claims in the light of the Scriptures? How genuine are those convictions we have held unto for so long? When rightly judged by the written word of God, will they be found to be true and binding?

What should serve as the believers' life compass: is it human traditions and values or personal opinions or the truth of the Scriptures?

Rather than ordering our lives after established scriptural truths and standards, our mindsets are often trapped in glossy cultural and religious assumptions founded on flawed understanding of the word of God.

Some popular beliefs on prayer, positive confession, enemies, Satan, demons, and spiritual warfare are pointers to the deep seated error that has overturned the true doctrine of the Scriptures in many hearts. Recourse to and dependence on symbols and means like holy water, anointing oil, Holy Ghost fire, dreams, prophecy and personal experiences bear witness to the pollution in thought streams. Somehow, we have come to believe more in those symbols and means than in God, the power of God, and the word of God.

BUT THESE THINGS WORK FOR ME!

Many are proud to defend their flawed beliefs. You hear many saying, "but these things work for me!" Yes, that is often the twisted reasoning behind many sinful errors; that thing called "It works for me!" It is all about self anyway. It is not about God or His righteous will.

Those who think this way - those who are always concerned about the outcome of things regardless of how those ends are achieved - are no different than the Egyptian sorcerers in the days of Moses. But though their

necromancy “worked” for them, those contrived outcomes were not of the Lord (See Ex.7:1-12).

Even the Israelites of old were guilty of this perverted reasoning. Their carnal cravings for meat in the wilderness “worked” for them. They indeed tempted God with their self-seeking request and “forced” His mighty hand to provide quail in the wilderness.

He also rained meat on them like the dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel (Ps.78:27-31).

Yes, God gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul (Ps.107:15). Wrath, judgment, destruction, leanness: such were the divine verdicts concerning their devised outcomes. What a dreadful reality! What a stern warning to professing Christianity!

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1Cor.10:11). Certainly, the living and powerful words of this Scripture pertain to us today. The Lord God is warning us greatly about our selfish desires and lusts. He wants us to be guided by His word and Spirit in our thoughts and actions, lest we fall into the snare of the devil.

The Scripture again testifies, now *these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted* (1Cor.10:6), for *with most of them God was not well pleased* (1Cor.10:5). Yes, it is an evil thing that mortal men would presume to “force” their proud selfish desires on the Almighty God. Whenever this is the case, the LORD God is not pleased!

IS THERE A CONNECTION?

Perhaps the foregoing explains the leanness in the soul of mainstream Christianity. Perhaps God has sealed us up to our own selfish desires and lusts. Perhaps that is why we are never satisfied. We drink but are never filled. We thirst again. We eat but are never satisfied. We hunger again.

The Lord Jesus is not the constant object of our desire. He is not our solid Rock. Thus our ground is always shaking, for we stand on sinking sand. Since we have conditioned our callous hearts to hear and not obey the word of the Lord, we are daily witnessing the sorrowful reality of our departures from the will of the Lord. Before our very eyes, our lofty religious ideas are being swept away in the flood of worldliness. We are no match against the intrigues of Satan. We are not wise!

WHAT ABOUT ABRAHAM THE FRIEND OF GOD?

Yes, that is a brilliant question! Indeed, what about Abraham the friend of God? At least, his disobedience “worked” for him. Abraham’s self-invented solution to his lack of an heir “worked” for him. Hagar got pregnant and heaven did not rend because of it. The pregnancy survived; God did not destroy that innocent seed. Behold it was a boy; an heir for the moment.

Whatever Abraham had desired, he had equally achieved it with his own human wisdom and strength. What a courageous man. His ways was not pleasing to the Lord, yet heaven kept mute; everything was “working”. The boy was born fully formed, he was not physically challenged; Abraham’s foolishness did not affect the fragile little boy in any apparent negative way.

Ishmael survived, grew and prospered. Yes, God even blessed him. Everything “worked” as Abraham had planned; everything resulted as God had always warned. Whoever sows to the flesh will reap corruption (Gal.6:8). Beware pilgrim, beware when everything is working as you planned.

CORBAN

There is a widely accepted principle among many people. The principle says that “the end will justify the means”. Some believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are also using this principle to coordinate their lives. This mindset often

reflects in the way they relate to other people or handle situations. However, it is not the will of God for His children to think that “the end will justify the means” regardless of how misguided that “means” may be. That is not the right way to think. Instead, the thoughts and lifestyle of God’s children in Christ must be marked by love, compassion and truth.

It is God’s desire that love, compassion and truth should mark our relationship with others. But whenever we are bent on satisfying our own desires without regard for love, compassion and truth, then we have chosen the crooked path of expediency.

Expediency is like an old religious concept called *Corban*. *Corban* means a *gift for God*. Some think that since something has been set aside as a gift for God, then that particular thing cannot and should not be used as a gift to their fellow humans. This line of reasoning maintains that once something is suited to an end, it must surely serve its purpose.

While it is good to lead a purposeful lifestyle, it is equally good to be guided by love, compassion and truth in all that we do. Sadly, even many who profess to know God lack these virtues in their life.

In response to their unkind way of thinking, the Lord Jesus reminded the Pharisees in His day of a very important narrative. This story was about David the servant of God. When David and those who were with him became hungry at one point in their journey, they entered

the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for David to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests (See Matt.12:3-4).

The truth the Lord Jesus wants us to know in the narrative above is simple. We must learn to add love and compassion to the truth we practice. If that gift you have set apart for God will save a life in a particular situation, it is well pleasing to God if you commit that gift for God to the wellbeing of that person in dire need of it. *Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help. Do not say to your neighbour, "Go! Return tomorrow and I will give it," when you have it with you at the time* (Prov.3:27-28). In the final analysis, whatever is done to your fellow man is done to God. If you clothe the naked, render help to the sick, and visit those in prison to comfort them, you have in essence done all these things to God (See Matt.25:34-45).

The truth is, if we cannot love our fellow man that we can see, how can we claim to love God that we cannot see (1Jn.3:17; 4:20)? The whole Law and the Prophets stands on just two commandments: to love the LORD God and to love our neighbour (Matt.7:12; 22:35-40). The story of the Good Samaritan summarizes love as central truth of the scriptures (See Lk.10:25-37).

BUT I AM WORKING FOR GOD NOW!

Yes, you are working for God! God is often our easy scapegoat. Or who else can bear so much with our lies and

wickedness? Who else but God! O the riches of His mercies!

But observe! In the name of “working for God”, many deprive their neighbours, and even parents of the love and care due them. Jesus condemned this wicked tradition in His day. He challenged those religious leaders perpetuating it. *For Moses said, ‘Honour your Father and your mother’ ... But you say, if a man says to his father or mother, ‘whatever help you would have received from me is Cor’ban’ (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father and mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do (Mk. 7:10-13).*

You see, even when we so much believe that what we are doing is for God, and at the same time we are contradicting the basic principles of love, compassion, fairness, and truth, then something is wrong. That is exactly what the Lord Jesus was saying to those religious leaders of His day who misled people with their traditions. The same applies to us today. Your wife, children, parents, and neighbours do not have to suffer because you are working for God. No! If and when occasion demands that you meet their need at the expense of what has been set aside for a particular work of God, then go ahead and do it.

The story of the widow of Zarephath in 1King 17 comes to mind. But it was a one in a thousand situation. It does not have to be that way always. Or else we are saying God is

always allowing such extreme famine to befall His own people. Unless we are saying God is fond of not providing for the needs of His children. And that can never be true. Therefore, God's word must be rightly applied in situations.

But if we still seek to satisfy selfish desires in the name of the Lord, if the name of the Lord is taken in vain, if our self-seeking lips worship God though our hearts are far away from Him, if the commandments of men are taught as the doctrines of the Scripture, then the LORD God will not hold us guiltless who have taken His name in vain.

THERE IS HOPE

Yes, the aberration is alarming! Yes, the errors are pervading! Indeed, iniquity abounds and the love of many has waxed cold (Matt. 24:12). Perilous times are truly upon us all (2Tim.3:1)!

Nevertheless, all is not lost! Truth's bitter pill will heal those who are willing and ready to partake of it. There is hope! Truth can yet reign where once falsehood held sway.

The Lord God has instructed His children not to be conformed to this world. Rather, they ought to be transformed by the renewing of their mind, that they may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rm.12:2). The cleansing power of God's living word

ought to purge believers daily from all filthiness of flesh, mind and spirit.

Hence the Bible speaks of *the teaching of the Lord and the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things* (Acts 13:12; Titus 2:10). All that is necessary for life and godliness is in the rich knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence (2Pet.1:3).

What blessings therefore abound for God's children in the wealth of His word!

Through the renewing of their minds by the sound teachings of the Scriptures, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will be able to judge all things and hold fast to that which is good (1Thess.5:21).

For there is no other way to pleasing God than God's own way! This is the issue facing us!

2

BEFORE MAN SINNED

BEFORE MAN SINNED

*May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue
that speaks proud things,*

Who have said, with our tongue we will prevail;

Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us? (Ps.12:3).

Do they not go astray who devise evil? (Prov.14:22)

Rebellion precedes human history, and this was how it began.

In heaven, before the fall of man, a conceited heart and an unruly tongue were found in a creature of God! And so the stage was set for that foul upset in the chronicles of earth.

No thunder met the erring thought. No verdict roared against the altered form within. All was clear to God from whose eyes nothing is hidden; yet heaven remained silent. Amazingly, that which now stoked the embers of evil was a bright spirit, a very creature of God's delight.

Immense evil can arise from a place of boundless goodness. The pathway of Lucifer in the chronicles of heaven reveals this solemn truth.

This bright spirit named Lucifer, nurtured a creeping conceit! A subtle shift in thought soon led to a high regard for self as against reverent obedience to the will of God. In his pride, Lucifer challenged for the throne of the Almighty God.

But remember, it all began with a strange thought within his conceited heart. That hidden thing of darkness went on unchecked; those evil counsels of the heart never weakened! The scheming continued; the cruelty ravaged on.

Thus a scheming heart and a cruel tongue became Satan's armoury, with which he disputed the eternal sovereignty of the Almighty God. No wonder God hates a lying tongue and a heart that devises wicked imaginations (Prov.6:16-19).

I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High (Isa.14:13-14). These were Lucifer's boastful words. This was the iniquity found in him (Ezek.28:15).

The desire to *be like the Most High* plunged Satan into eternal ruin. Through pride, Lucifer, the son of the dawn, became the prince of darkness. (Isa.14:12-15). And he led many hosts of angels astray in his hopeless rebellion (See Rev.12:4).

This is the history of lawlessness! For *Sin is lawlessness* (1Jn.3:4). And lawlessness is rebellion against God's revealed will.

But lawlessness did not proceed from man. Indeed, lawlessness began in a sacred sphere of splendor and harmony; in the very heaven of God! And that bile of malice soon poisoned the flawless field of Eden.

With the same craftiness and flattery, Satan came unto Eve in form of the serpent and initiated his subtle arguments, saying *Has God indeed said...? You will not surely die... For God knows... you will be like God, knowing good and evil* (Gen.3:1-5).

Observe how the scenes unfold.

Satan questioned God's word, and cast doubt on His goodness and truthfulness. Was God good? Did He speak the truth? These were the questions Satan's poison raised in the mind of Eve. It was an appeal to desire, a call to lust after things which do not accord with God's will.

Eve fell into the temptation. She was deceived into disobeying God because her heart was not set on God's word. And there alongside her, Adam knowingly committed the same evil.

PRIDE AND IDOLATRY

Adam and Eve, and the whole of humanity as seen in them, in lawless revolt like the devil, sinned against God (Rm.5:12). Sin is defiance against God (1Jn.3:4).

At the root of rebellion lies the desire to *be like the Most High, to be like God, knowing..!*

Like Satan, man's rebellion against God exposes man's evil desire for the absolute knowledge and worship that belongs only to God.

Man wants absolute worship. Man wants absolute knowledge. They have learned these proud desires from Satan himself. Like Satan, it is man's lawlessness that daily drives his brazen hatred and resistance of God and all that is of God. Through pride, man fell into the condemnation of the devil (1Tim.3:6).

Pride is a tree of bitterness bearing unholy fruits. The first murder stemmed from pride and rebellion. While Abel humbly sought God's face in God's own way (Heb.9:22), Cain in his pride approached heaven with his own self-forged means (Gen.4:1-7). For this Cain was rejected and rebuked! Still, he would have none of God!

Armed with the same murderous intent like the devil, *Cain talked with Abel his brother; 'let us go out to the field'* (Gen.4:8). There with mortal rage, Cain spilled his brother's blood. He did so because he did not accept the judgment of God!

By so doing, Cain challenged the worship, knowledge, and judgment of God. He rejected all in unrepentant folly. But he first deceived Abel with his tongue; he first lured Abel unto death within his wicked heart! Cain chose the path of the enemy; and, indeed, he *was of the evil one* (I Jn.3:12). Many do likewise today.

MAN'S REBELLION

Humanity's insolent inclination towards pride and idolatry grew with time (Gen.4:16-24), and God testified that *every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen.6:5).

For this, God rained his fierce judgment upon the then world, condemning the perversions of the earth with the great flood (Gen.7:21-23), while sparing only Noah and those that were with him in the ark.

But this did not bring an end to human wickedness as the Scriptures testify. Rebellion once again reared its relentless head in retaliation, seen in Nimrod's Tower of Babel.

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech... and as they journeyed... they found a plain... and they said to one another, 'come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves (Gen.11:1-4)

The Tower of Babel is founded on that selfsame ambition of mankind to be the center of his own existence. Humanity wants none of God, and will stop at nothing to rid Him of His place among them!

Thus in utter disregard for the commandment of God that humans should multiply and fill the whole earth (Gen.1:27-28), mankind chose their own way, seeking to make a name for themselves (Gen.11:1-5).

They did; men and women alike built a city and a tower, a city wherein they can consolidate the rule of man over other humans, a tower of reasoning that will rival the counsels of heaven.

But there and then, God speedily confused their language, and scattered them all over the surface of the earth (Gen.11:7-9).

This was done that mankind may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and that His will shall stand, no matter the opposition from humanity and Satan (Dan.4:25; Isa.14:24)!

MAN WANTS A RELIGION

Alas! Though the sentence against the lawlessness of man was executed speedily, still the heart of mankind is set in them to do evil.

Man wants a religion that is founded on rituals and externals. Man craves a culture that is man-centered. Man seeks a tradition that promotes mere moral system that is no match against sinful desires of the flesh.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spot? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil (Jer.13:23).

This is the picture of man in his self-chosen wicked ways!

ALL THAT IS IN WORLD...

For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1Jn.2:16).

All was not lost at Babel. Man knows this, and God knows too. That vast wasteland of man's lofty invention yet exists, though its material tower crumbled before the wearing powers of nature. Though the tower was abandoned, the reasons for its erection were not. Man left with something, an agenda more subtle and sinister. He built a great city, and that within his wicked heart.

The world is a unified system in thought, will, and action. Speech and culture may differ from place to place, but not the ultimate intention of man's evil heart. They may appear divergent in social, fiscal, and legislative orderings. Struggles may even erupt, and missiles exchanged in bloody warfare. But scan their objectives, carefully consider their ends, and you will discern a common overlap. The things of man always intersect in a uniform scheme.

As a system, the world wants to be free from the sovereign control of God. Men will snarl, rebel and seek their own ways; they will have all except God! *Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us (Ps.2:3)*. This has been mankind's counsel against the LORD; such is the order of this wicked world under the yoke of sin and Satan.

Through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, Satan dictates the workings of man within

the stronghold of his slaving system. This is all that is in the world, her kingdoms and their glory. Pleasures, covetousness, and self-importance, these are the ways of the world.

The appeal of Satan, sin, the world, and the flesh are always the same: *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* (1Jn.2:16). This is the history of the enemy's strategy.

Satan is such a dogged strategist who believes so much in his weapons because they are so effective in any generation and culture. He doesn't care to reinvent anything. Just look closely, and you will find out that his appeal has always been *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* (1Jn.2:16). That's always the content, though the container may vary in time and space.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ are not of this world. Though they are in this world of sin and wickedness, yet they do not order their lives according to the evil dictates of the world and its system (Jn.15:19; 17:14, 16).

Believers in Christ, therefore, are called unto a life that stands in pointed opposition to this evil system. This is the real battle of the Lord; this is the real battle for the soul.

Believers belong in a Kingdom that is governed by the golden laws of their Lord and King, Jesus. They are called unto a holy and righteous walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is their duty to constantly escape defilements that are in the world through lust. There must be ceaseless cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, while perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2Cor.7:1). This is believers' high calling in Christ.

At home and at work, the world and her corrupt system will always seek to influence believers' decisions. How believers relate with their spouses, raise their children, interact with their brothers and sisters, care for their parents, act towards their neighbours, relate with their customers: their thoughts, words, and deeds: these are the targets of the enemy of their soul.

These are spiritual concerns; these are matters of eternal significance. If believers fail in all these, they have failed in all. The commandment of the Lord is that believers walk as *children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world* (Phil.2:15).

God's children must resist the thinking that these things are of little significances, because they are not! A little rising of darkened thought, a feeble echo of poisoned words, a little serpent in a little garden, a little fox in a little vine, a little leaven in a little lump; *is it not a little one?* (Gen.19:20) But *see how great a forest a little fire kindles, too* (Jms.3:5). Nothing is little when it comes to spiritual matters.

THE VANITY OF CARNAL RESPONSES

Little here, little there, the enemy is busy gathering his armies, strengthening his camps while believers draw back in the battle of the Lord. Thus he continues to gain advantage of God's children, for they choose to be ignorant of the devil's subtle devices.

Remember the word of our Lord, that *the children of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light* (Lk16:8). The children of this world know why they sing the way they sing, dress the way they dress, think the way they think, speak the way they speak, and act the way they act. They are faithfully following the laws of their kingdom and principal, the devil. They are good servants of their fallen lord.

The children of light, on the other hand, often lack discernment. We often adopt the world's ideas to win over the world unto our God and King. How are we this deceived?

Moral decadence is a mark of spiritual departures. But this is what mainstream Christianity has failed to discern. That's why today's Christianity is ever improving on her carnal methods. When those methods fail, she reshuffles to relaunch, only for her schemes to fail again. Professing Christianity think fleshly indulgences can be tamed. Unfortunately for her, man's ideas will always perish with the using (Col.2:22)!

THE EFFICACY OF GOD'S WORD

Carnal methods can only produce carnal outcomes. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh! Man's religious ideas, creeds, and benevolence may lure people to church services and into denominations, but never will those inventions bring anyone unto the Lord Jesus.

But *the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons* (2Cor.10:4). The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is not an appeal to sensual desires and fleshly dictates. God's word is the sure guide when dealing with the malice of Satan.

The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times (Ps.12:6). For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... (Heb.4:12). And that is all we need to resist the enchantments of the devil and his hosts.

Remember then, that men will only be drawn unto the Lord by the word of the Lord in the energy of His Spirit alone. Think it simple, think it foolish, think it unsophisticated, but that is the way of the Lord. This is the power of God.

3

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE
WORLD

GOD ALONE

O God, who is like You? (Ps.71:19).

*For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone
are God (Ps.86:10).*

*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the
demons believe, and tremble (Jms.2:19)*

*Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath (Rev.15:4;
Ps.90:11).*

*Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted
among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth
(Ps.46:10).*

The LORD God sits in heaven; He sits unmoved in majesty and unchallenged in power; He rules unmatched in wisdom and unrestrained in will by the malice of men and the intrigues of Satan.

By God's power alone shall His knowledge be preserved in all the earth, His word shall overthrow all contrary words (Prov. 22:12).

Therefore, *there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD* (Prov.21:30).

The boastful wisdom of this world, the profane understanding of this age, and the wayward counsels of its rulers cannot stand against the LORD.

I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God (Isa. 44:6). This is the glorious decree that thunders from the Scriptures. God's absolute testimony about Himself defies all principalities and powers with eternal assurance.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE POWERFUL IDOLS?

Yes, what about them? What about the wicked powers of those household idols? What about the demonic manipulations of those ancestral village gods?

These and other likely questions may becloud your heart with fear. But the word of God is our anchor against all the roaring lies of Satan. And this is not a persuasion that encourages blind faith in one impractical promise of hope. The true and living LORD God is the very rock of defence of those who put their trust in Him (Ps.94:22). And remember *there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD* (Prov.21:30).

The LORD God declares that idols are nothing in the world (1Cor.8:4). The LORD God pronounces all carved images as mere works of mortal men (Ps.115:4). Yes, all molten images of earth are wind and emptiness (Is.41:29). All the gods of the nations are worthless (Deut.16:26). There is no other god besides the LORD (Deut.32:29). Hallelujah!

But man will yet boast, for his thoughts are vanities (Ps.94:11). The world will yet parade her inventions, for her form is passing away (1Cor.7:31). Satan will still deceive, for his time is short (Rev.12:12). But *He who sits in heaven shall laugh, the LORD shall hold them in derision* (Ps.2:4).

Though numerous tongues battle against the LORD, and Satan's activities provoke the eyes of His glory, yet they shall all be ruined. The LORD will put them in fear, that the nations may know they are but men (Ps.9:2).

THE SWAY OF THE WICKED ONE

The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one
(1Jn.5:19).

There is a perilous blemish on the fallen creation. And God cannot lie. The whole world indeed lies under the sway of the wicked one. The whole creation is held in the bondage of corruption; it groans and travails in pain together until now (Rm.8:20-23). Bondage and corruption is man's dreadful heritage. Bondage and corruption is man's wretched portion. These are the woes of the inhabitants of earth!

But it was not so in the beginning. At one time, holiness and peace reigned in unhindered fellowship between God and man. But iniquity ruined the sweet communion between God and man. Iniquity entered that scene of holiness and peace through the enemy's deception.

Who then is this enemy? Who is this adversary of God and all that is of God? Who has come *to steal, and to kill, and to destroy* (Jn.10:10)? Who is *the god of this age who blinds the minds of those who do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ* (2Cor.4:4)? Who is *the prince of demons* (Mt.12:24)? Who is *the father of lies* (Jn.8:44)? Who is *the accuser* of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ the Lord (Rev.12:10)? Who is *the great dragon and old serpent* (Rev.12:9)? Who *disguises as an angel of light* (2Cor.11:13-15)? Who is *like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1Pet.5:8-9)? Who is the lurking bear, waiting to pounce at each turn of a pilgrim's spiritual progress?

That enemy is Satan! The Lord Jesus described Satan as the prince of this world (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Like in the time of the Lord's trial at Gethsemane, the evil we see around us and sometimes experience shows that this is the hour of Satan and the power of darkness (Lk.22:53).

But there is a reason for these things. Satan holds such sway over the creation of God because God has permitted it for a season. That is why the scripture says the whole creation is held in the bondage of corruption, and it groans and travails in pain together until now (Rm.8:20-23). *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope* (Rm.8:20).

Yes, in all these, the Almighty God is the LORD; *He rules by His power forever* (Ps. 66:7). *For the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness* (1Cor. 10:26). God is always in

charge though human reasoning may conclude otherwise. Nevertheless, man's petty opinions cannot derail the eternal counsels of God. The LORD God rules by His power forever. Amen!

BELIEVERS IN JESUS CHRIST

Beloved, now we are children of God (1Jn.5:19).

*Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?
(Rm.8:33).*

Believers in Christ are not of this world. We are of God (Jn.17:14-17; 1Jn.5:19-20; Col.1:13-14). The Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father (Gal.1:3-4). Our hope and strength is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, we are exposed to tribulations in this sinful world (Jn.16:33). Adversity in its varied forms is humanity's common lot, for *the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty (Ps.74:20)*.

When permitted by God, believers may experience afflictions from Satan and his evil world system (Job.1:6-12, 2:3-6; Jn.15:20, 16:33; Mt.23:34; Acts14:22). Indeed, we are called to suffer for Christ's sake (Phil.1:29; 1Pet.2:21). These trials are often put in place by the Lord for the testing of our faith (Jms.1:3). Satan may even ask

to sift us as wheat, but the Lord will pray for us, and our faith will not fail (Lk.22:31-32).

Satan may bring about a believer's physical imprisonment (Rev. 2:10). Satan can orchestrate hindrances in varied forms (1Thess.2:18). God can permit a messenger of Satan to be a thorn in our flesh and buffet us (2Cor.12:6-9) Like Job, the Lord may permit Satan to touch you with deaths and sicknesses and loss of business! It is a fearful thing, but He is a sovereign God nonetheless! There is nothing anybody can do about that!

But hear how the story ends concerning Job. *Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord; that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful* (Jms.5:11).

Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them (Heb.7:25).

4

OFTEN TROUBLED

OFTEN TROUBLED

We are often troubled in trying circumstances. Sometimes, we think *curses, generational sins, or personal sins* are at work. These are common assumptions through which discouragement sets in. But we are not left without hope. The word of God answers to our deepest needs and questions.

ON CURSES AND CONTRARY PRONOUNCEMENTS

As for curses and contrary pronouncements, hear what the word of the Lord says to those who know and follow Him. *Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel* (Num.23:23 cf Rom.11:16-20; Phil.3:3). When the gates of hell take counsel together, it will come to nothing. When they speak a contrary word, it will not stand, for God is the defender of those who put their trust in Him (Isa.8:10). The LORD God shall break their bows of strife and burn their chariots of war (Ps.37:12-15). Every tongue that rises against God's people in judgment shall be condemned because the righteousness of the LORD will justify His children against all satanic accusations (Isa.54:17; Rm.8:33). For *who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it* (Lam.3:37)? Have you not heard how the LORD *broke the arrows of the bow, the shield and the sword of battle?* For He is *more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey* (Ps.76:3-4).

As children of God, we do not live in denial of evils around us. *Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof* (Mt.6:34). We know that there are snares of the fowler, and there are perilous pestilences. But we also know that the Lord shall cover us with His feathers, and under His wings we shall take refuge (Ps.91:3-4; 57:1). Have we not made God's truth our shield? Do we not believe in the promises of the Lord to keep and guide us? Is God's might unable to shelter us?

You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of pestilence that walk in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday (Ps.91:5-6).

Indeed, there are arrows that fly by day; there are terrors that walk in darkness. But the LORD God says do not fear them, for you have made the Most High your dwelling place. Amen!

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (Ps.46:1-3,7).

ON INVOCATIONS

Nobody can declare, pronounce or invoke any good or evil upon a child of God without God's consent. The case of Laban with Jacob shows that God is supreme in all matters of life. Laban said to Jacob, *It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad'* (Gen.31:29).

Now, the lessons here are clear. Laban has power to harm Jacob; there is no denying that. However, God's sovereignty overrides all other powers and counsels in any situation. So it is with a child of God. Nothing tampers with the counsels of God for your life. You are in His hands.

No doubt there are powers that can harm you. A soldier of Christ is well aware of fiery darts of the enemy. Nevertheless, only the plans and purposes of God for His children shall be established. For *who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?* (Lam.3:37-38).

The enemy has said *I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them* (Ex.15:9).

But hear the testimony of the righteous. *Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the*

snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD... (Ps.124:7-8). Hallelujah!

What is your own testimony?

ON GENERATIONAL SINS/CURSES

Concerning generational sins/curses, the word of God says, *like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so a curse without cause shall not alight* (Prov.26:2). God will only visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children of them that hate Him. If and when the children continue in the sins of their fathers, God will judge them like their fathers. This is what the Scriptures teach. Everyone shall be judged for his own iniquity (Ex.20:5; Ezek.18:1-4; Jer.31:29-30).

However, if dark powers are summoned to curse you as a true believer in Christ, be sure the Lord will turn their curses into blessings for you. When Balak sent for Balaam to curse the Israel of God, the Lord overturned Balaam's words. Instead, the Lord by His power preserved His own counsel and blessing concerning His own people.

They hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse you. Nevertheless, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you (Deut.23:4, 5. See also Num.22-24). This is the word of God. His love for His people is everlasting (Jer.31:3). Thus He overthrew all

contrary thoughts imagined and words spoken against His people (Prov.22:12).

LET THOSE REJOICE WHO PUT THEIR TRUST IN YOU

O that we will truly put our trust in God while faithfully obeying His word. This is what true faith is all about; trust and obedience. Whatever knowledge or experience that tampers with our trust in and obedience to God in His word is of the Devil. Any theology or spiritual understanding that puts you in fear of Satan and his demons, while unsettling your trust in the Lord God, is demonic. The word of God says, *but let those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You. For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous with favour. You will surround him as with a shield* (Ps.5:11-12). This is the word of the Lord!

GOD'S UNFAILING PROMISES

Against our fears and doubts, the LORD God promises His goodness and mercy on those who love Him and keep His commandment (Ex.20:6). Everything that pertains to the life of those who fear the Lord is hidden in the secret place of God's presence from the plots of men and the strife of tongues (Ps.31:19-20). Do not fear therefore, for your life is hid with Christ in God (Col.3:3).

Assuredly, we have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son - the Lord Jesus Christ (Col.1:13). Has God not spoken? Will He not perform?

His word indeed says *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love* (Col.1:13). And so it is! *Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven* (Ps.119:89).

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Is.55:10-11).

If God says He has delivered you from the power of darkness, how is it someone tells you, "See, you still need deliverance again and again from the power of darkness", and then you go on believing that person's testimony? Is that not sheer disregard for the testimony of God? Why will you believe a lie?

This was the case with some Israelites who walked in unbelief. They never entered into the rest God promised them because they decided to believe the lies of the ten spies and not the faithful testimony of Joshua and Caleb (See Num.13-14). That is why you too have not entered into the rest God promised you in Christ. You have always

lived your life in fear of the power of darkness and death. You do not believe the word of God.

You see, situations of life or circumstances that present themselves may not always reflect your position in Christ. Often, our walk in this evil world falls short of our exalted position in Jesus Christ. But that is not a reason to be discouraged. Rather, it is a cause to rise up to the occasion and by faith walk in that position that Lord has determined for you.

The very fact that you are called a soldier and granted access to divine weapons of warfare shows that you have been freed from the bondage and stagnation of sin and demonic powers. A captive remains in chains. A soldier is freed. A soldier has access to the armoury. A soldier needs to layhold of those weapons and use them as both offensive and defensive arsenals. If indeed such is a good soldier of Christ. If indeed such understands the trainings and investment of the Lord in his spirit and soul. If indeed such realises that the details and severity of situations on the battle field may differ in proportions from those on the training field.

So when God says you are delivered from the powers of darkness, it means you are indeed freed from their slaving influences and powers under which you had no option of resistance before (see 2Tim.2:25-26). But now, in Christ Jesus, you are freed and free to defend your freedom. Unless you allow yourself to be entangled again (see Gal.5:1).

Your entanglement will not nullify the truths God has spoken concerning your freedom. Rather, your entanglement will reflect your lack of understanding of those truths. Therefore, *arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you* (Isa. 60:1).

But you must arise by faith! You must shine the light of this truth in your daily walk of faith. Remember your light has come. Remember the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. You are a soldier of Christ. You are not a slave to sin and Satan. Remember! Therefore shine your light, and that darkness will disappear. Hallelujah!

It is written, *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, Jesus Christ Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Heb.2:14-15). This is the word of God! True believers are released and delivered already! Do you believe?

They curse, but You will bless. When they attack, they will be humiliated, but Your servant will rejoice (Ps.109:28). This is the word of the Lord to you. May our unbelief be gone in Jesus name!

God's word says *He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him* (Ps.103:10-11).

Do you fear God? Do you believe in His word? Then this promise is for you. Let your soul find rest in the LORD God, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.

INSIGHTS INTO BELIEVERS' TRIBULATIONS

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Ps.46:1).

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we stand secured in God's steadfast love for us. We are hidden in the secret place of God's presence. This is our standing; this is our heritage in the Lord Jesus Christ.

While we are to rejoice in this refreshing truth, we must also walk vigilantly because the days are evil (Eph.5:15-16). As good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph.5:17). Ours is a constant spiritual warfare on the battle front of the Lord against a relentless foe and his committed hosts. We must put on the armour of light always; we must wage the good warfare always (Rom.13:12; 1Tim.1:18).

There is need for soberiety and watchfulness. It is never in the will of God that we become vain and boastful. Instead, we are to rejoice with trembling. We must take heed to the thoughtful admonition of the Scriptures which says,

Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering. And, after you have suffered for a while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him belongs power forever. Amen (1Pet.5:8-11).

The scripture above is clear. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, like good soldiers, must be sober and alert. There is no room for slackness. *For you all are sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert and be sober...we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as helmet our hope for salvation (1Thess. 5:5-8).*

The only way to resist the devourer is to be strong in your faith. You must be assured of God's eternal love for you in the midst of sufferings brought about by Satan. The evil machinations of the enemy may intensify against your soul so that you may doubt God's love for you in those contrary experiences befalling you.

Satan's plot is to frustrate your trust in the living God. The enemy of your soul is always after your heart. That is why the Christian pilgrim must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of righteousness in the Lord and His word. You should not for a moment entertain doubts in your heart. Be shielded by God's love as promised in His word.

The God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (1Pet.5:10-11). This is the word of the Lord. You are called by Christ's eternal glory. God Himself will restore you, confirm you, strengthen you, and establish you increasingly in His love and truth. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it (1Thess.5:24).

My son... keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul... when you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught (Prov. 3:21-26).

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward (Heb.10:35).

In all things we must commend ourselves as ministers of God and good soldiers of Christ by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by the Holy Spirit, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left (2Cor.6:4-7).

Do not be afraid of sudden terrors, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes. The Lord has promised to be your confidence, but you must trust in His love, power and wisdom in those situations. Stand fast, and see the salvation of the Lord!

5

THE WARFARE

THE WARFARE

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...
(Eph.6:12).

*For the weapons of our warfare are not human
weapons... (2Cor.10:4)*

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are described as good soldiers. They are portrayed as trained spiritual warriors (2Tim.2:3-4). Therefore, they must be skilled in matters of spiritual discernment. It is their duty to understand the times because the days are evil. They are obliged to know the will of their Lord, Jesus Christ, and to walk vigilantly in the midst of a crooked generation. Necessity is laid on every good soldiers of Christ to endure hardness and afflictions. This is their calling in Christ Jesus; this should be their daily experience.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not just mere men. The whole armour of God which they are required to always put on is not for decoration. There are raging battles against their souls. The gates of hell are ever opposed to the counsel of heaven in their lives. Soldiers of Christ, therefore, are actively engaged in warfare. This is their reality, whether it is admitted or not.

Obedience is a soldier's rule of engagement. *No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier (2Tim.2:4).* Men and women alike, the duty of Christian soldiers is to please their Lord. He is the Lord of

the Way; He leads them into all truth in His word through His Spirit potent. Such is His promise to them (Jn.16:13).

But soldiers of Christ do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Their spiritual battle is not against contrary physical beings – whether it be human or things. Therefore the weapons of their warfare are not human weapons. The artilleries of Christian soldiers are not physical at all. There is no need to take up physical arms against perceived enemies. That is not the way the Lord Jesus directed us to wage our warfare.

Rather, as sheep among bloodthirsty wolves, the Lord Jesus Christ instructed His own soldiers to be *wise as serpents and harmless as doves* (Mt.10:16). Surely, evil and corrupt men will hate and revile believers in Christ. Unrighteous souls will falsely accuse those who belong to Christ like they did to Christ Himself. But the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ must dictate the character of His soldiers.

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Mt.5:44). Love, bless, do good, pray for: these are the righteous instructions we have received from the Lord. We must demonstrate our obedience to these instructions in the face of oppositions. For *the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God* (Jms.1:20).

These instructions may sound illogical. There is no denying that the wisdom of man teaches otherwise. But

the foolishness of God is wiser than men. The Scripture says: *let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand* (Phil.4:5). The Captain has spoken, ours is to heed His voice.

Surely, there is a higher calling, a divine order far above the folly and violence of sinful men. There is much more at stake than bloodshed! *Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; with the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself* (Ps.76:10). The wrath and violence of sinful men will always lead to God's glory. *There is no wisdom, or understanding or counsel against the LORD* (Prov.21:30). The Lord will frustrate all the counsels of the nations. His counsel alone will stand (Ps.33:10,11).

The Lord God promises to *give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist* (Lk.21:15). In Christ therefore, yours is a mouth that cannot be repressed by forces of evil. In Christ, yours is a wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

Armed with that *mouth and wisdom*, behold righteous Stephen before his adversaries; *they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke* (Acts 6:10).

They were cut to the heart; they do so now,

They gnashed at him with their teeth; they do so now,

They cried out with a loud voice; they do so now,

*They stopped their ears; they do so now,
They rushed at him in one accord; they do so now,
They stoned him to death; they do so now,
They thought they did it for God; they do so now,
Still he prayed, still he blessed*

(See Acts 7:54-60).

The judgment of the Lord is true concerning bloodthirsty men and women who are determined to destroy the righteous because of the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus says they are of their father the devil, and the desires of their father they will do. The devil was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth (See Jn. 8:44).

In spite of the apparent opposition of the enemy and his emissaries, the righteous must remain strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Do you remember those weapons Stephen used? A mouth, wisdom, and the Spirit? Do not let those attributes drift away from you. Let those qualities guide your thoughts and actions, and then you will see how your seeming weakness will be made strength in the Lord. You will discover how your seeming foolishness will be made wisdom in the Lord. You will witness firsthand the power of God's grace in your soul. For the weapons of your warfare are mighty in God!

BUT AGAINST...

Principalities, Powers,

Rulers of the darkness,

Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places...

(Eph.6:12)

Strongholds, Arguments,

Every high thing, Thoughts,

All disobedience

(2Cor.10:4-6).

How many principalities do you know? How many powers are you aware of? Do you know covens of the rulers of darkness? Can you tell of the pathways of spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places? What about their strongholds? What about every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God in Christ? What about their arguments against you before the Lord? What of thoughts that daily seek to make you captive? Do you know of all disobedience and evil systems in the world?

Can you master the deceitfulness of your own heart? How about the twist of situations? How about the schemes and movements of those invisible but rattling adversaries? What do you know about the individual spirits of evil that scout the soul?

The truth is that man knows so little, talks so much, and does so little. Though we may not accept this statement, our denial does not nullify the truth it conveys. Man remains feeble and finite. And because we are weak in ourselves, *the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us* (2 Cor.4:7). May our soul make its boast in the LORD; may the humble hear of it and be glad.

There are many things we do not know in spiritual realms. There are many details we cannot comprehend in heavenly places. There is so much knowledge we cannot understand in spheres beyond the skies. But we do know that *if God be for us, who can be against us?* (Rm.8:31). Hence we must stand by faith in God's promises. We must know the truth and walk by faith in it.

Still we must tread carefully. We must not be hasty in thoughts or in words. Even though we have our victory over Satan and his fallen hosts in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be wise in our approach to this mighty being. The word of God warns us against bringing railing accusations against powers we do not know (Jude 8-10).

We are often tempted to use abusive words when referring to Satan and his demons. You hear some believers call the devil a bastard and the likes of it. This ought not to be so. How does using degrading words reduce the sinful sway the enemy has over millions of souls who are held captive to do his corrupt will? None!

Therefore, instead of carnal and boastful reactions, the prudent option will be to confront the devil and his wiles

in the name of the Lord. In Christ, we can boldly say to Satan, *the LORD rebuke you...* (Jude 9). *We can resist the devil...steadfast in the faith*(Jms. 4:7; 1Pet.5:9). The best way to put the enemy to shame is to live in constant obedience to the will of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. That is true steadfastness in the faith.

Stand therefore by faith in the victory of Jesus Christ the Lord. Remember that when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, triumphing over them in the cross (Eph.4:8). And indeed, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Rm.8:37). We have this assurance that His promises concerning us shall not fail, so that we may boldly say, *the Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me* (Ps. 118:6)?

May we be strengthened with all might by His word in our inner man. May we sing the songs of David, and raise our voices in defiance against unnumbered foes, saying, *But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head...I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around* (Ps.3:3,6). *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers...* (1Pet.3:12). Amen!

THE HEART AND THE TONGUE

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jer.17:9).

The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (Jas.3:6-8).

There is one thing that is yet evil, yea two that boast of great things against the Lord. But who or what are these two things that boast against the Lord? Is it the devil and his demons? Is it the world and its rulers? What or who are these two boastful enemies?

The answer is not hard. These two boastful things are the *heart* and the *tongue*. These two elements mark the essence of man; what he is within and without. Man possesses a *deceitful, desperate, and wicked heart*. Man owns a *tongue* that is *a fire, a world of iniquity, and an unruly evil*. This unruly tongue then expresses the abundant contents of the deceitful heart. Man's nature is constantly opposed to God!

The word of God says *those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man* (Mt.15:18). Evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these and more are defilements that spring from the heart. These are the fires of evil that man's tongue daily stokes. These are the deeds of man, these are his perilous pathways.

God and man can never be in agreement if man continues in his evil pathway. The solution then is repentance. Man

must think upon his evil ways and turn his feet to God's word. *I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies* (Ps.119:59). This must be man's response. This is what man must do to please the Lord.

Only God's word can purify the heart; only the commandments of the Lord can cleanse from all filthiness. Only the truth can set free from the bondage of error, sin and Satan (Jn.8:32). Except we receive the words of God and treasure His commands within us, until we incline our ears to wisdom and apply our hearts to understanding, we will never know the fear of the Lord, nor find the knowledge of God (Prov.2:1-5).

These two elements, the *heart* and the *tongue*, therefore, are called into obedience in Christ. Unless a deceitful heart and an unruly tongue are brought to the obedience of Christ, they can never be for God. The heart must bow to the Lord Jesus in righteous belief, while the mouth must confess to God's salvation in humble adoration (Rm.10:10). Both must be subject to the will of God in Christ.

Remember this. Satan is incapable of humility and obedience to the truth. Even though he had the fullest possible revelation and experience of God, he however cast it all aside as so much dung in his lawless revolt (Isa.14). And it is in this aspect of godly humility and obedience that we have our greatest triumph over Satan.

When Satan sinned, God judged him. But what was his response? Instead of submission to the judgment of God,

Satan instead revolted, and led many hosts of heaven astray in his hopeless rebellion. Those are the demonic forces that trouble our world. Satan and his hosts want to destroy the work of God. They are determined to taint God's good and perfect creation with the corruption of sin and self will.

When Adam sinned, God judged him. But what was his response? Adam, unlike Satan, submitted to the judgement of God. He repented and thus received a covering from the Lord. He was forgiven (see Gen. 3:21). The Lord God did not allow Adam and Eve to continue in that state of shame and rejection. He restored their hope through His forgiveness. Even though the consequences of their disobedience persist, yet in death, they will see the face of the Lord again. A hope of a restored eternal fellowship.

God's forgiveness immediately attended to the severity of His judgement against man's disobedience. Instead of both physical death and eternal spiritual death, God's forgiveness restored the hope of eternal life instead of eternal death. This is the gospel truth in the Lord Jesus Christ. What man cannot escape is physical death. Physical death is a reminder of God's judgement on his sin.

Yes, I know I have digressed a little. But through the explanation above, can you now see why Satan is incapable of humility and obedience to the truth? That is why Satan can never receive forgiveness. Because he never repented!

The eternal humbling truth is that God has ordained strength in the mouth of babes and nursing infants – in frail frames – like you and me. Through us, He daily silences the enemy and his fallen hosts in their pride and hopeless rebellion (Ps.8:2). Through our reverent obedience to God, Satan is daily condemned. This is true spiritual warfare!

But if we do not accept the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, if we fail in this modest rule of godliness, how are we different from Satan? With pride in our hearts, we are sure to *fall into the same condemnation as the devil* (1Tim.3:6).

Our conceited confessions will testify to the corruption within us. If like Satan we are full of self, saying *I will do this! I will do that! I am this! I am that!* Then we have fallen into the same condemnation as the devil. If in our prayers, we churn out boastful commands and expect God to heed our decrees, we are no different than Satan (See Isa.14).

How can we plead for God's mercy and grace, and then immediately start to boast against Him? How ridiculous!

But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil (Jms.4:16).

Shall the axe boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood (Isa.10:15).

But this is exactly what we do when we open our frail lips in haughty decrees, expecting the Almighty God to bow to our costly demands speedily, without regard for His own will in those situations. *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?* (1Cor.10:22).

Thus with your mouth you have made yourself great against Me and multiplied your words against Me; I have heard them (Ezk.35:13). Yes, the foul fume of our boast daily greets God's throne.

But one day, *the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted* (Isa.2:11). That day is coming; it is near at the door.

CONSIDER THIS

A swollen heart and an unruly tongue were Satan's armoury when he disputed the eternal throne of the Almighty God. Through his unyielding zeal for supremacy over God, Satan further led some angels astray in his rebellion against God. Though Satan lost this battle, he did not resign on his sworn revolt against God. Satan furthered his dark enterprise upon the earth.

Thus, with a crafty heart and flattering lips, the serpent (Satan) came unto Eve in the Garden of Eden and deceived her. It was a successful plot. Mankind also became an enemy of God by choosing the path of disobedience like

Lucifer. Evil kept unfolding, and the enemy will not surrender soon.

Behold the wicked Cain also! Armed with the same murderous intent like the devil, Cain spilled his brother's blood. But before Cain could successfully carry out his wicked plans, he first deceived Abel with his tongue; he first lured Abel unto death within his wicked heart! *The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbour finds no favour in his eyes* (Prov. 21:10). Cain planned the evil in his heart, and dealt out violence against his brother in the field.

Again, in his grim efforts to foil the eternal counsel of God's salvation in Christ, the devil again hurled his venom at the Lord Jesus with the same conceit and deception. *If You are the Son of God...worship me* (Mt.4:3-11). Such was the devil's effrontery, even before the Lord of glory. And to accomplish the wicked plotting, wicked hearts and lying tongues were again called upon against the Lord. Judas Iscariot, stirred by the evil one, betrayed Jesus, first within his wicked heart, and then with his lying lips. Thus the Lord of glory was slain by the piercing malice and poisoned shouts of cruel men.

Like their Lord and King, believers in Jesus will experience fierce oppositions. Wicked hearts and evil tongues will always resist all that is of God and His Christ. The Lord Jesus said *if you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you* (Jn.15:19). It could not be otherwise.

But in His deep longing to the Father concerning His own people, the Lord Jesus prayed that the Father will keep them from the evil one (Jn.17:14-15). That is why Satan has not been able to stay the mighty waves of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The devil cannot halt the message of the King. For *Great is our God, and mighty in power* (Ps.147:5).

Yet, deception abounds. The harlot (sinful influence) is still on the street. This immoral woman (sinful influence) stands at every corner; she flatters with her words in the blackness of the night. Through deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, the great enemy is wreaking havoc in these latter times.

The signs of his corrupting influence are evident: *men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God* (2Tim.3:1-4). These are the miseries that have befallen this generation; these are the wounds that shall never be healed!

Observe. The disturbing character of those whose feet are caught in these wanton snares of the enemy is that they will all have a *form of godliness* while *denying its power* (2Tim.3:5). They will have religious affections, but they will despise the Lord in their hearts. *They will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears*

(2Tim.4:3-4). The days are indeed evil. O that we might be discerning!

But there is another voice, the mighty voice of Wisdom (moral/spiritual influence). She is pure and peaceable. She stands and *calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open square* (Pr.1:20-21). She calls unto peace, she calls unto life. The righteous voice of Wisdom will never be drowned by the harlot's unhallowed noises; the counsels of the enemy shall not prevail.

For the voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon (Ps.29:4-5). So whenever the Lord sends forth His commandment upon earth; His word runs very swiftly (Ps.147:15). Hallelujah!

And so this battle of the heart and the tongue will be fought to the end of time; the enemy will not relent, he will deceive many, and gather his foul army against Him who alone is exalted in heaven, even our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev.16:13-16; 19:19).

STOP AND THINK

Do you know that today, nobody is shooting missiles into the clouds to bring down the throne of God. Like in the days of Noah, like in the time of Job, all the enemy needs are arguments, imaginations, flattery, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

These are the weapons of the adversary, these are his ways. And he finds innumerable willing hearts and tongues to accomplish it. It is the battle of ages. That is why the Lord shall grant His remnant *a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist* (Lk.21:15).

The enemy is always on the offensive. He provoked the war in heaven, he launched the attack at Eden, and he hauled his arsenals at the Lord Jesus in the wilderness without invitation. He is a determined foe. If he could strive against the LORD God and our Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot escape his confrontations. Like Satan, Cain created trouble for Abel where it did not exist. It was Goliath that first defied the army of Israel. These are pointers to the nature of spiritual warfare.

For this reason, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must always put on the whole armour of God. We must *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3). Through sound teaching of the word of God accompanied by a worthy life of godly testimony, we wage our good warfare (1Tim.1:18-19). The testimony of the Lord, like Israel's ark of old, is borne on the shoulders of righteous living.

THE CORE

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are always at war. And the struggles are often internal; unseen, unheard, unnoticed. Therefore, spiritual warfare is more of an

inward spiritual matter for each individual believer. A renewed heart that is daily purified by the living truth of God's word, and a tongue that proclaims that learned truth in righteousness, is central to the essence of true spiritual warfare.

Spiritual warfare is not all about a show of corporate religious acrobatics. True spiritual warfare is more than our religious showoffs. But we are too distracted to realize that the serpent is still as cunning as he was in the beginning (See Gen.3:1). Our self-forged organized deliverance sessions are no match against demonic intrigues.

Satan himself is the prince of all lying wonders. Perilous times are indeed upon us. The swelling congregation of men flocking to our religious meetings is not a sign of true spiritual revival. The strangling hold of sin and wickedness in the land testifies to the vanity of our organized religion. True inner transformation is missing, iniquity abounds, and the love of many is waxing cold. So how will God hear our vain repetitive prayers flowing from defiled conscience and unclean lips? How?

What we need is not more religious activities. We do not need more deliverance sessions. Our great necessity is the living and powerful word of God. What we need is the inner operation of the Spirit of God that transforms lives into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need the Lord Jesus Christ not our futile methods.

Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer (Ps.17:4).

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Prov.4:23).

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against You (Ps.119:11).

THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1Jn.3:8).

The course of this world is according to *the prince of the power of the air*. Things are not just happening by chance. There are powers behind the orderings of events.

Satan is that *spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience* (Eph.2:2). Satan is that spirit that opposes God and His word in the hearts of men (2Cor.4:4). This is his grand-work!

The works of the devil are deception and destruction. The devil is a deceiver and murderer (Jn.8:44). It was through the devil's deception that man became God's willful enemy. It was through Satan's deceit that man set his feet on the path of eternal damnation. Thus in the devil, we see falsehood and death.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1Jn.3:8). The Lord Jesus Christ who is the truth and the life (Jn.14:6) came to utterly destroy the wicked works of the devil. Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus Christ destroyed Satan's slaving deceit through the liberating truth of the gospel. The Lord Jesus gave life abundant where death held sway (Jn.10:10). Hallelujah!

The Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Tit.2:14). Hallelujah!

Soldiers of Christ, therefore, must fight the good fight of faith. We must uphold the testimony of our Lord. We must contend earnestly in prayer, righteous living, and effectual teaching of the word of life. If we must silence the avenger, if foul mouths must be stopped, if we must subdue the ignorance of foolish men, then we must put on the whole armour of God. We must put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

SOLD UNDER SIN

But I am carnal, sold under sin (Rm.7:14)

Man in his fallen state is *carnal, sold under sin* (Rm.7:14; Gen.6:5). *Sin dwells in man* (Rm.7:17). Without help, man will continue to be a slave of sin. Until *purchased or bought* by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ,

man will remain *sold under sin*. Remember, it was man's choice to sin against God in the beginning. Man disobeyed God because he wanted to.

Therefore, sin is a conscious revolt against God's revealed will. *Sin is lawlessness* (1Jn.3:4). Sin is willful rebellion.

The word of God says *every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually* (Gen.6:5; Rm.6:19). Man's rebellion was a downward slope into more sinfulness. Man continues to present himself as *slaves to obey sin* (Rm.6:16). This is what it means to be *sold under sin*. Man is capable of such evil against himself because his heart is deceitful above all things (Jer.17:9).

Unfortunately, the enemy that man sold himself unto is one *who would not open the house of his prisoners* (Isa.14:16-17).

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? (Isa.49:24). Satan is like a *strong man, fully armed*, and he *guards his own palace* (Lk.11:21). This is man's position; he is a prey of the mighty, he is a lawful captive of sin and Satan.

So man needs someone who is *stronger* than Satan to *come upon him and overcome him*. Man needs that *stronger man* to take from Satan *all his armor in which he trusted, and divide his spoils* (Lk.11:22).

But thus says the LORD: even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be

delivered (Isa.49:24-25). And this is exactly what God did for man in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ was anointed *to preach deliverance to the captives* of sin and Satan (Lk.4:18; Ps.146:7, 107:10-11). Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, God conquered Satan, and sin (Rm.6:1-16; 8:1-14). *You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive* (Ps.68:18; Eph.4:8). In Christ, sin is condemned in the flesh (Rm.7:5).

A NEED FOR WATCHFULNESS

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ need to stand fast in the reality of Christ's victory over sin and the flesh. Complacency is a terrible snare to the soul. We often fall into temptation when we are not watchful.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin (Rm.6:12-13).

You see, we are prone to doing the very opposite of what the word of God says. You may be puzzled by the possibility of such sinful experience in a child of God. But that is just it; sin can reign in a believer's mortal body when he or she chooses to yield his or her body members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin.

But it ought not to be so. Instead, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to take sin captive. It shall not have dominion over us. We should not let sin reign in our

bodies (Isa.14:2; Rm.6:12-14). Every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2Cor.10:5).

Through the Spirit of Christ - the Spirit of truth and power - the believers are to constantly put to death the sinful deeds of the body. There must be a constant *reckoning* of themselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm.6:1-16; 8:1-14). This reckoning is twofold; we must always be *dead to sin*, we must always be *alive to God*. Remember, sin is what you allow.

Our old man - sinful humanity as seen collectively in Adam as under sin (Rm.6:6), *the old man* - each individual as seen personally under sin (Eph.4:22-24; Col.3:9-10), *the body of sin* (Rm.6:6; Col.2:11), *mortal body* (Rm.6:12), *the body of death, the flesh* (Rm.7:24-25), *the body of the sins of the flesh* (Col.2:11): all of these descriptions speak of the corrupting influence of sin in man. God by His Spirit would grant us as many pictures as possible so that we are not ignorant of the enemy's extensive workings in man.

The Scripture presents the whole body, soul and spirit of man as under the corrupting influence of sin. The word of God speaks of *you, your members, the heart, me, I, my mind, your mind, and your bodies*. All these are under constant threat of sin. That is why Paul the apostle prayed that *may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus*

Christ (1Thess.5:23). This is what God will do. This is what he expects us to do by his enabling grace (1Thess.4:3).

WHENEVER GOD JUDGES SIN

Lust is first conceived, and then it brings forth sin, and sin afterwards brings forth death (Jms.1:15; Job 15:35; Ps.7:14; Mt.5:28).

Whenever God wants to judge sin, He will not spare the person who committed the sin. So sin, iniquity, evil, are always judged in relation to the offender. *The soul that sins shall die* (Ezk.18:4; Rm.6:23; 1Cor.15:56).

The LORD God is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* (Hab.1:13). And that is the problem. God hates sin. He cannot endure iniquity. He will always judge evil. This was true when iniquity was found in Lucifer. The blazing sword of God's judgment fell on Adam and Eve when they sinned in Eden. It was true in the days of Noah when God condemned the perversions of the earth with the great flood. Sodom and Gomorrah were reduced to ashes under the raining flames of God's judgment for their great abominations. So shall it be *in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ* (Rm.2:16; Acts 17:31).

THE FLESH AT WAR WITH THE SPIRIT

There is a primal nature in man that God in His word often describes as *the flesh*. It is not the same as our simple physical body. It is rather a complex contaminating component in man revealed in different ways.

There are people who live *according to the flesh* (Rm.8:13). Since *the flesh* has *lusts* and *sinful passions* (Rm.13:14; 7:5; Gal.5:16), *those who are in the flesh cannot please God* (Rm.8:8). Those who are living *according to the flesh's lusts, sinful passions and affections* will never do anything that pleases God. They will always do things contrary to the will of God. *The flesh* will always live according to the rule of sin (Rm.7:25). It will always grow corrupt according to the deceitful lusts (Eph.4:22). Those who sow to *the flesh* will of *the flesh* reap corruption (Gal.6:8).

The flesh has *appetites* and *desires* that cannot be tamed by rigorous discipline of the physical body. Such disciplines *are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh* (Col.2:23; Eph.2:3).

The flesh always *strives against the Spirit* of God in believers (Gal.5:17). This is one of the fearful descriptions of this sinful essence even in a child of God. A believer's choices are never free from this conflict. There is a constant struggle going on within us. We decide each time whom to obey; either the *Holy Spirit* or *the flesh*. We decide between the two! We choose. We act.

The word of God is a *discerner* (Heb.4:12). It reveals to us that *the flesh has works or deeds*, and that with the eye of the Spirit, one can perceive when these *works or deeds are manifest* in man.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like (Gal.5:19-21). These characteristic *works or deeds of the flesh* mark the course of man's conduct.

But we are not left without instruction in righteousness. The word of God is clear; *do not give the devil an opportunity* (Eph.4:27). Yet we are often lacking in obedience to this simplest of commands. Little wonder why we suffer needless spiritual damages from the assaults of the enemy.

It is not because we are without help; rather it is because we often give place to the devil. Ours is a life of slackness and carnal indulgences. And through the unsubdued activities of the sinful flesh, our spiritual edges are broken. O the crucial need for vigilance.

THE WEAPON OF OUR WARFARE

Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips,

I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer

(Ps.17:4).

When it comes to the hold of sin, the whole body, soul and spirit of man is drawn in. There are *fleshly lusts which war against the soul* (1Pet.2:11). There are *filthiness of body and spirit* (2Cor.7:1). We have learned to indulge the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph.2:2). So, this contaminating component in man affects his whole spirit, soul and body.

But no believer in Christ Jesus is left to wage this warfare against *the flesh and its lusts* alone. We are helped by the Spirit of power and truth. We have the word of God; we have the Spirit of God. Our sufficiency is of God. So we can boldly proclaim *the LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped* (Ps.28:7).

The believer's basic rule of engagement is simple obedience. We either obey God or go astray. And whenever we choose our own ways; whenever we become presumptuous in our defiant rebellion against the Holy Spirit, we suffer loss, great loss.

Always remember, therefore, that *no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier* (2Tim.2:4). The Lord calls it *the affairs of this life*. You

know them as I do. And when we are entangled with the affairs of this life, we will not please Him who has enlisted us as soldiers.

We will be too distracted, too entangled, and too wise in our own conceits, forgetting we are at war. We will never be satisfied, we will never have enough, and our wounds will never be few.

We can be trapped in this mire of our own choosing. Hence the admonition to *lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us* (Heb.12:1). There are weights indeed, weights of worldly entanglements around us. But there is *the besetting sin*, the one that so easily ensnares us. It speaks of our own pride, lofty ambitions, self-indulgences, and self-justifying deceptions. Nobody teaches us these; we conceive of them on our own.

The race that is set before us, therefore, requires endurance. It requires great perseverance, it calls for self-denial, and it calls for an earnest devotion to the Lord.

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek him with the whole heart (Ps.119:1-2). Such blessedness!

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul...the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes... more to be desired are they than gold...sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward (Ps.19:7-11).

WALK IN THE SPIRIT

I say then: walk in the Spirit,

and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal.5:16)

Formerly, when we were without Christ, we were like all men, we were *in Adam*, under the yoke of Satan, sin and death. *In Adam* all sinned, *in Adam* all died (Rm.5:12; 1Cor.15:21-22). Ours was a life of *lawlessness leading to more lawlessness* (Rm.6:19). *We were dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. We were sons of disobedience, conducting ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Thus we were by nature children of wrath* (Eph.2:1-3).

Observe the downward slope. We were *in Adam, in Adam we sinned. We were in the flesh, we walked in the flesh, fulfilling its lusts. We continued in disobedience; we were by nature children of wrath.* It was, therefore, not just about Adam. Rather, it was also about us, the life we live. Or was it Adam that taught you how to lie? Have you seen Adam before?

But having come to Christ by grace in true repentance, we became children of God in Christ. *For God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself* (2Cor.5:19).

Thus *in Christ*, we are no longer *in the flesh*. Rather, we are now *in the Spirit* (Rm.8:9). And one mark of those *in Christ* is that they *do not walk according to the flesh*,

but according to the Spirit (Rm.8:1). A walk in the Spirit is therefore a walk in Christ. He who claims to be in Christ ought himself also to walk just as Christ walked (1Jhn.2:6).

Since the Lord Jesus *always did those things that please God*, believers *in Christ* must of necessity seek to always do those things that please God through the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in them. This is what it means to walk in the Spirit. The believer's aim is to be well pleasing to the Lord in all things (2Cor.5:9). If we are indeed *in Christ* (2Cor.5:17), like a branch *in the vine* (Jn.15:1-10), then we must be *found in Him* (Phil.3:9), like a branch *abiding in the vine* (Jn.15:4), always in the position to constantly receive from Christ in order to *grow up in all things into Him* (Eph.4:15) like a branch *bearing much fruit* (Jn.15:5).

PUT TO DEATH

Mortify your members which are upon earth (Col.3:5)

Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, and idolatry are *your members*. Yes, the word of God calls them *your members*, your companions, those sinful components lurking within you. They are matters of the heart. And the Lord says, *mortify* them. Put them to the sword!

Are you not a soldier? Do you not have the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God? Then you have all it takes

to overcome all sinful tendencies. In the power of the Holy Spirit, a soldier of Christ must learn to always turn the word of God against all besetting sins. Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, and idolatry, and hosts of the enemy's daily temptations will never cease to assault the righteous soul. But with the help of the Holy Spirit and guidance of the word of God, victory is assured.

Since *the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword* (Heb.4:12), you can trust the Lord will use it to pierce through your heart, to discern and to purge your soul of all filthiness. The working of God's word requires *piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Heb.4:12). It is a fearful thing. But that is the way to your spiritual wellbeing. We all must learn obedience through needed suffering in the school of discipline and devotion to Christ. It is the only way.

PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and make no provision for the flesh,

to fulfil its lusts (Rm.13:14)

Sanctify the Lord Jesus Christ in your hearts (1Pet3:15).

This is baffling, nonetheless true: we are the very accomplice in matters of fleshly lusts. What evil marks our ways! We often make provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

The flesh will always lust. That is what the corrupting power of sin has rendered it into. But we are the main problem here; we help the flesh fulfil its lusts by making provisions for those lusts. So scary a truth! We help the flesh do its dirty jobs. Woe unto us! What shame! What folly!

By faith in the word of God, we are taught that having been joined by the Holy Spirit to the Lord Jesus as our Head and Saviour (1Cor.12:13), we have, by virtue of that spiritual union, *put on Christ* (Gal.3:27). We are one with Christ in image and likeness. That is the Christian identity. In 2Cor.5:17, the spiritual reality is that each believer *in Christ* is entirely a *new creature*.

Thus, the spiritual reality of *putting off the old man* and *putting on the new man* as seen in Col.3:9-10 establishes the conscious participation of individual soldiers of Christ. Through yielding themselves to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in whose power alone they live above all the dictates and lusts of the flesh, they can overcome.

Humanity is joined to Adam *our old man*. Thus without Christ, you are that *old man* both in sinful knowledge and character according to the image and likeness of Adam who is your spiritual head (Gen.5:3; Rm.5:12, 14).

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ too are joined to Him as their spiritual head. Seeing they are now a *new creation*, they have in essence *put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him* (Col.3:10). A believer's life is thus marked by *righteousness and true holiness* (Eph.4:24). As *elect of God, holy and beloved*, the Lord says *put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering* (Col.3:12).

The Christian life is a high calling indeed. Day by day we are faced with choices that determine eternal destinies. Both within and without, the battle must be fought and won in the energy of the word of God and His Spirit alone (2Thess.2:13).

We must daily cherish our union with Christ. We must set apart the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts. We must hallow Him with all the careful devotion that becomes His holy bride. It is a call, a duty. When the Lord Jesus becomes our treasure, our hearts will always be with Him, *for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Mt.6:21). Thus, a Christian walk is marked by faith, virtue, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2Pet.1:5-11).

BE STRONG IN THE LORD

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (See Eph.6:10-20)

Finally, my brethren: this is how the searching admonition begins. Everything meets here. There is that constraining halt that demands the busiest attention. The charging voice seems to roar, pilgrim listen this once, if never again. The great Captain of our salvation commands, all eyes fixed on His potent frame, hearts pant with each piercing thrust of eternal counsels.

There are *wiles of the devil*; there are *fiery darts of the wicked one*, says the Lord. *In the evil day*, nothing else will stand except those who are *strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*. Pilgrims, we are at war! These words echo still, O that we would be discerning!

Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Pilgrim, you are no match against the schemes of the enemy of your soul. On your own, defeat is certain. At one contrary force, you will fall at Satan's frightful feet. Therefore, you must *be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*. There are *principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places*. Those are the invisible yet raging adversaries, the individual spirits of evil that scout your soul.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God. Maintain your position. Be alert. Remember the days are evil. *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having*

put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

The charge is to *take up* in conscious daily engagements *the whole armour* you have *put on*. Do not be found wanting, sitting idly while the battle rages. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor rest to your frame, only *be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*.

It all begins with *truth*. Girding our waist with truth speaks of a position of dependable strength. It is in the nature of truth to first defend its own character against error, and then proceed as an offensive weapon. So it is with a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth must be learned and practised first, it must become the dictate of every life details. Only then can the same truth be used against errors and wickedness of men and principalities. When we know the truth of God's word, it sets us free from all the deceptions of the enemy of our soul. Therefore, the word of Christ must dwell in us richly in all wisdom (Col.3:16).

We must walk in the firm understanding of and belief in *God's righteousness in Christ Jesus our Lord!* We are of God in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1Cor.1:30). *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (1Cor.5:21).

So it is not about self-righteousness. That is a sinking ground. The enemy will torment your soul with your apparent moral failures and inability to fulfil the laws of the Lord. You have lost the battle even before the war begins!

Therefore, the *righteousness of God in Christ* is the believers' breastplate against offenses of the enemy targetted at our hearts. That is why the heart must be kept with all diligence lest it be led astray by error and unbelief.

Once the heart is established in the knowledge of God's righteousness in Christ for salvation, the enemy of our soul sets out in his bitter quest to corrupt the walk. The tactic is to frustrate the believers' walk in righteousness since his position is already secured in Christ Jesus. The temptation is to lead a careless life that does not reflect Christ's righteousness. For a seed should only produce its kind.

Pilgrim, do not loose your guard. Remember it is a *becoming*. Your life must reflect the righteousness of Christ. Christinity is a serious call to righteous walk of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Righteousness is practical in character. It is the life of Christ evident in the walk of a believer. I repeat, a seed should only produce its kind.

Woe unto us if we do not preach *the gospel of peace*. The gospel remains the power of God unto salvation (Rom.1:16). We must not yield to the enemy's threats to stop us from declaring this great gospel of our salvation.

We must declare to a dying world, Jesus saves, Jesus saves!

Is your waist girded with truth? Have you put on the breastplate of righteousness? Then you must preach the gospel. For the gospel is the truth of God's righteousness in Christ Jesus for salvation. Hallelujah!

Take *the shield of faith*, never cease to trust and obey, for therein is the essence of true Christian faith. The fiery darts of the enemy will surely come against you. Your trust in the Lord will be tested by fiery trials. Do not cast away your confidence in the Lord. Obedience of faith then becomes your anchor in those perilous hours of your journey as a pilgrim. You must obey the Lord rather than men or the dictates of situations. The instruction remains clear: *take the shield of faith!*

Put on *the helmet of salvation*, be assured your eternal salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ is sealed and settled, for Christ will never lose any sheep that His Father has given Him. This assurance of salvation will reflect in your walk as someone saved from the bondage of sin and Satan. It should not be otherwise! It is *the helmet of salvation* and not a covering for licentious lifestyle.

And grasp *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*; let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom. When the enemy assaults with trials and temptations untold, withstand all such contrary counsel with the ever living and powerful word of God.

It is written! It is written!! It is written!!! That is the singular most formidable weapon of the Lord Jesus against the fiery temptations of Satan. The word of God was the Saviour's stronghold. Learn from the Master! Or do you have a better approach?

These are the instructions of the Lord. And we must take heed to them.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and utterance for the gospel...

There are temptations to overcome. There are traps to escape. There are evil schemes to discern. There are tricks and craftiness to withstand. There are terrors to endure. There are thoughts to render captive. There are hindrances to frustrate by means of persistent prayers (Dan.10).

We must indeed PRAY! We must submit ourselves to God. The word of God admonishes us to *watch and pray* (Mt.26:21). But we must watch carefully (Eph.6:18). While we are to resist the devil steadfastly in faith (1Pet.5:9), it is equally required that we flee all appearances of evil (1Thess.5:22).

Prayer is admission of our weakness and expression of our dependence. Prayer to God teaches us how feeble we are. It enlightens us on our utter dependence on the wisdom, power, and love of God. In the place of prayer, man is man and God is God! Humbling truth!

Thus we must pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit (Eph.6:18; 1Thess.5:17), and with all watchfulness and perseverance for all the saints (Lk.21:36; Col.4:2; Eph.6:18), according to the will of God (1Jn.5:14).

To pray is to be like Christ *who, in the days of His flesh...offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears* to God (Heb.5:7). We must learn such godly fear from Him who through intense devotion and submission has mastered what it means to beseech the Lord God.

Like Paul the apostle, we learn to plead with the Lord in prayer, while accepting His will in all situations (2Cor.12:7-10).

Thus in the face of apparent hindrance by Satan, we must learn to pray and trust God still (1Thess.2:18; Rm.15:22). And *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much* (Jms.5:16).

We pray at all seasons because we are ever weak and dependent upon the Lord. We pray with all prayer since every passing moment, we have learned to cast all our care on Him who cares for us (1Pet.5:7). We travail in prayer with all perseverance because the Lord Himself has taught us that man ought always to pray and not to faint (Lk.18:1).

Yes, we pray for all the saints, trusting God for their guidance and wellbeing. We learn to pray in the Spirit with understanding because we know that we are weak

and do not know how we should pray as we ought. And the Spirit does this with groaning which cannot be uttered according to the will of God (Rom.8:26-27).

Therefore, prayer is not a manipulative human effort through which we impose our shortsighted wills and desires on a “God” who has no option than to answer us “speedily”. That’s not true godly prayer, and for sure such prayers are not offered to the God Almighty.

In prayer, therefore, we must learn to respect God as our Father, lean on His power for all situations, and trust His wisdom for all outcomes. If truly we believe in God’s love, we will not make haste with our lips; we will not be haughty in our minds.

Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You...Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD (Ps.31:19, 24).

You may be led to sing these inspired lines as you go on in this journey of faith. May you find grace in them in time of need.

Begone, unbelief; my Saviour is near,

And for my relief will surely appear;

By prayer let me wrestle, and He will perform;

With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm...

Another is like unto it, and you may as well sing with faith and assurance:

Safe in the arm of Jesus,

Safe on His gentle breast;

There by His love o'ershaded,

Sweetly my soul shall rest...

Now, I believe the LORD has sent out His light and His truth unto you; may they always lead you, may they always bring you unto His holy hill, even unto the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is *able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God through Him* (Heb.7:25).

6

THE NATURE OF PRAYER

THE NATURE OF PRAYER

Whose testimony will you accept; God's or man's?

Many believers in the Lord Jesus get it wrong in the area of prayer because they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. In ignorance, many have embraced man-made doctrines as the commandments of God. Sadly, most prayers do not reflect the will of God as revealed in His writtren word.

Now, there is danger here. Whenever men teach or accept man-made traditions and doctrines as God's own truth, they lie against God's faithfulness and moral glory. In essence, God is charged with falsehood while sinful mortal men lay claim to righteousness.

But contrary to such abominable thought, the Scripture assures that God will be justified in His words and will prevail when He is judged (Rm.3:4). He will triumph in all demonic arguments and falsehood of men against Him.

Observe. It is at once a fearful thing that God will be *judged!* Yes, God will be judged by the lawless malice and inventions of unrighteous men. Yet, the Lord God will be justified in His words. The glory of God's surpassing knowledge shall be preserved throughout all ages. Hallelujah!

One day, the Lord will execute judgment on all ungodly deeds committed and harsh words spoken against Him (Jude 14, 15).

Surprisingly, many believers will be found guilty of this grave evil against their Lord, since they have refused to accept His righteous will for them. They do not truly believe that the Lord Jesus can judge their enemies in His own divine way. Therefore, these believers have decided to take matters into their own hands by pronouncing curses on and desiring misfortune against their enemies.

YOU HAVE NOT SO LEARNED CHRIST

Some Christian prayers are full of hostility against perceived enemies. Curses are pronounced on and cruel vengeance wished against all oppositions. *But you have not so learned Christ* (Eph.4:20).

This vindictive wisdom is not from the Lord Jesus Christ. Violence and cruelty are the steep inclinations of a wicked heart (1Jn.3:12). Murderous intentions belong to the devil (See 1Pet.5:8; Jn.8:44).

Still, some believers in the Lord Jesus Christ persist in this error. They bless our God and Father with the tongue, and curse men who have been made in the image of God with the same tongue (Jms.3:8-9). *Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening..?* (Jms.3:10-12). Truly, it ought not to be so!

While on earth with His disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ discerned such ungracious character in James and John.

Consequently, He rebuked them sharply, saying, *you do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them* (Lk.9:55-56).

And why did Jesus rebuke them? He did because *they said, Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?* (Lk.9:54). And that is exactly what some believers are doing today. Each time we sing *God of Elijah send down fire*, or in any way wish evil against our enemies, we deserve rebuke because our spirit is not right.

When John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (LK.1:17), he did not call down fire on the unrepentant people of Israel. Instead, he preached the message of repentance with such holy zeal and warned the brood of ungodly against impending judgement of God if they refuse to turn from their sinful ways.

So why will you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ seek that your supposed enemies should die or perish or be consumed by your imagined Holy Ghost fire? You do so because you are being led astray by principles of human culture and tradition. In often ignorant and sometimes willful zeal, you are esteeming the thoughts and ways of men above the word of God.

The Lord Jesus once rebuked Peter, saying *get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but of the things of men* (Mt.16:23). Indeed the things of men are stumbling blocks to the Lord

Jesus Christ! It is certainly a great evil when God's children allow their hearts and minds to be guided by fleshly principles.

Like many believers today, Peter here was earthly in his concerns, and therefore received a sharp rebuke from the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ rightly called Peter Satan.

That was a fearful indictment from the Lord Jesus on one of His disciples! Peter set his mind on earthly things and not on things above (Col.3:2). That was a sin Peter needed to repent of! Like Peter, many believers need to repent of their violent prayers. We all must *be renewed in the spirit of our mind* (Eph.4:23).

The Lord Jesus is our perfect example. And it is God's will that believers be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus (Rm.8:29).

The Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples to love their enemies, bless those who curse them, do good to those who hate them, and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute them. Only by so doing can they truly be children of their Father who is in heaven (Mt.5:43-48). And Jesus has set a good example for His people, *when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously* (1Pet.2:23).

It is instructive that the one through whom the Holy Spirit testifies in the Scripture above was Peter the apostle, the very one that was once rebuked by the Lord for having a wrong mindset. The very Peter that violently cut off the

right ear of the high priest's servant. O the renewing power of the truth that sets free! Peter repented, setting a godly example for those who will humbly accept the will of God in all they do in His holy name.

O that we would fear God and shun evil like Job the servant of God. His state of mind towards those who hated him was gracious. *If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, or lifted myself up when evil found him (indeed I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for a curse on his soul (Job 31:29-30).* This was the testimony of Job, for he considered it an iniquity deserving of God's judgment if and when he thought evil against his enemy. For the Lord strictly warns His children, *do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the Lord see it, and it displeases Him, and He turns away His wrath from him (Prov.24:17).*

In the true meekness of Christ, believers must learn to accept the evils that men may do against them as from the hand of the LORD God. This is true concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, *who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, to be executed by nailing...to a cross at the hands of Gentiles (Acts 2:23).*

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Mt.10:29-30).

What a powerful testimony to the sovereign knowledge of God! We must trust His love, wisdom, and power! In all that may befall us in our righteous walk in and with the Lord; we must not cast away our confidence in His love, wisdom, and power.

Like David, even when innocent, curses may be rained upon us by a thoughtless enemy like Shimei. In spite of Shimei's cruel opposition, David said *let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day* (2Sam.16:11-12).

Yes, this is true faith; trusting and hoping in God alone. David knew that Shimei's curses are nothing; everything depends on God's sovereign will.

But some Christians are like Abishai, one of the men of David. We would rather take off the heads of our enemies. But David rebuked Abishai's unthoughtful zeal, saying *what have I to do with you, you son of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David'* (2Sam.16:10). What humility, what meekness, what confidence in the love, wisdom and power of God! May believers today learn from this and be less concerned about the roaring of the enemy.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WICKED SPIRITS?

Still, some may argue that they are not praying against their physical enemies, that they are only praying against their spiritual enemies; those wicked spirits that are indwelling their perceived physical enemies. They believe by telling those spirits to die and be cast into hell, those perceived physical enemies will no longer be inclined to do evil against them. More so, they can pray for the salvation of those demon-possessed enemies by telling God to grant them a repentant heart. So much contrived arguments in support of wrong thinking and teachings.

In John 8:44, Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, you are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

From the verse above, we see two obvious characteristics of the devil, namely, murder and lie. They are his evil characteristics drawn from his own evil resources or nature. And like the devil, the scribes and Pharisees want to murder and tell lies. They choose to be murderers and liars like the devil because they are like the devil in nature.

In Galatians 5:19-21 and Colossians 3:9, hatred, murder, lies, idolatry and sorcery are obvious works of the flesh. These are the common evils those of the opposition can do

to us. Those who hate us, or engage in sorcery against us, or try to murder us, or lie against us, or invoke idols against us because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are only living out their wicked sinful nature. And we were once like them, dead in our sins and trespasses according to Ephesians 2:1-10.

Those activities are not evil spirits to be commanded to 'die' and be cast into hell. They are works of the flesh. The Christian response ought to be supplications, prayers, and intercessions for all men, because it is God's desire that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth according to 1Timothy 2:1-4. By our prayers, sound teaching of the Scriptures, patience, gentleness, and humility – yes humility, we hope *if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will* (2Tim.2:25).

The message of John the Baptist in Matthew 3 is REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE. The message of Jesus in Matthew 4 is REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE. The message on Pentecost is REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE. In Acts 17, to the Epicureans, Stoic philosophers and idolaters in Athens, Paul's message was simple: REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE.

Acts 19:18-19 testifies of Sorcerers and magicians repenting and burning their books and instruments of deceits. All these were responses to the gospel preached. The Gospel Paul preached was not persuasive words of

human wisdom, but it came in the demonstration of Spirit and of power!

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16) to both Jews and Greek alike. We can simply approach our enemies with the gospel and learn to do well to them while trusting God for the salvation of their souls.

And the humbling truth is that believers too are prone to hatred and lies and idolatry (Col. 3:9). Covetousness is idolatry (Col.3:5). Hatred is murder (1Jn.3:15). Deny we may, but the Lord knows our hearts.

It takes godly humility to pray for our enemies. And by so doing, we will be like the Lord Jesus *in the days of his flesh*. And Jesus has set good example for His people, *who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1Pet.2:23).*

Do not say I will repay evil. Wait for the LORD, and He will save you (Prov.20:22).

They curse, but You will bless. When they attack, they will be humiliated, but your servant will rejoice (Ps.109:28). This is the word of the Lord to you. May our unbelief be gone in Jesus name!

ON LOVE AND DIVINE JUSTICE

*Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil:
the Lord reward him according to his works
(2Tim.4:14).*

*Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander;
whom I have delivered unto Satan,
that they may learn not to blaspheme
(1Tim.1:20).*

*Pay them back for their evil deeds!
Pay them back for what they do!
Punish them! For they do not understand the LORD's
actions,
or the way he carries out justice
(Ps. 28:4).*

*When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the
souls of those who had been slain for the word of God
and for the testimony which they held.
And they cried with a loud voice, saying, how
long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge
our blood on them that dwell on the earth?
(Rev.6:9-10)*

*Then the LORD said to Cain, where is Abel your
brother?
He said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?
And the Lord said, what have you done?
The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the
ground (Gen.4:9-10).*

*But ye are come... to Jesus the mediator of the new
covenant,
and to the blood of sprinkling,*

that speaketh better things than that of Abel (Heb.12:22, 24).

...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.
(1Cor. 12:31)

It is man's nature to want revenge. And it is God's way to ensure justice. God is a God of justice who repays each man accordingly. *Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord* (Rom.12:19). But then, it is only God that can judge righteously and weigh intents and actions perfectly. No man can do that. Hence the commandment, *dearly beloved, do not avenge yourselves (in thought, word, or action), but rather give place unto (divine) wrath* (Rom.12:19).

We must allow God to be in charge of every situation. And in the midst of it all, we are commanded by the Lord to choose the more excellent way of AGAPE LOVE. Jesus is our perfect example, and we must emulate Christ's pattern of life and instructions on godliness.

Every child of God has the right to demand for the justice of God in particular situations. But instead of demanding for justice, we are taught to bear pains for the sake of Christ, while trusting His power and wisdom to handle the situation better than we can ever think or imagine.

We must be like our Father in heaven, who causes His rain to fall both on the just and the unjust (Matt.5:44-48). Jesus is our perfect example for life and godliness.

The Gospel and our life are always the truest and best response.

WHAT ABOUT..?

Should we commit people over to Satan like Paul did? Should we say that God should reward our own Alexander the Coppersmith accordingly? Should we follow Paul's footsteps in these cases?

Is Paul's verdict in 1Corinthians 5 concerning the immoral brother extreme? Is Church discipline a "death sentence"?

What about Peter's verdict in Acts 5? Could the Ananias and Sapphira case have been handled differently? What is God saying to us here and in other instances of swift divine judgment?

What about 1John.5:16? What about when we are not to pray for a brother? How can this be?

COMMANDING GOD IN PRAYER?

In some quarters, Christians are taught to command God. Using the mind and tongue, they are instructed to bring the Almighty God into subjection to man's wills and demands. It is believed that the Ancient of Days can be ordered around without regard for His righteous and sovereign will.

But this is a great delusion!

Is there any man who can command and manipulate the One who upholds *all things by the word of His power* (Heb.1:3)?

The Scriptures speaks of the *firmament of His power* (Ps.150:1). Yes, He is God who reigns supreme over *all things...that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers* (Col.1:16). Herein lies the emptiness of every presumptuous exercise of the mind and tongue that seeks to *command and manipulate* God.

Consider this. Which human parents ever rejoice when a son or daughter spits his or her will in their faces? Should the Father of spirits do otherwise? Should the LORD God rejoice when His children despise Him with their proud confessions? Are we stronger than He? Or how can these things ever be?

A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is my honour? And if I am a Master, where is my reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise my name (Mal.1:6).

Like these priests of old, many believers often do not honour the Lord in their prayers; neither do they reverence Him in their requests. They oft take God's name in vain, hoping to force their selfish desires upon Him.

This sin of self-interest must be repented of! It is a great evil against the Lord!

A mindset that seeks to manipulate God for personal interests and gains is demonic! It is demonic because only the Devil will instruct anyone to *command* that something be done regardless of God's sovereign will. This was the very temptation of the devil against the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a temptation to decide for self without seeking God's will (See Mt.4:1-4).

It is neither godly nor wise to have such a mindset. The Lord God resists every understanding, tradition, or culture that is marked by *bitterness, envy, self-seeking, vainglory, and lying against the truth*. The Lord calls such wisdom *earthly, sensual, and demonic*. The outcome of such wisdom is *confusion and every evil thing* (Jms.3:15-16).

Yes, it is gross confusion to presume man can command his Maker; it is an evil thing to think that God will approve of self-seeking and vainglory.

True reverent confidence is in knowing and doing God's will. When as God's children we humbly ask and seek God in our prayers, we can be sure God will hear us if our request is found in His sovereign good will for our lives (See 1Jn.5:14-15). When we keep God's commandment and do those things that are pleasing in His sight, we will understand His will and our prayers will arise from a sincere heart (See 1Jn.3:22).

Christians ought to learn from the Lord Jesus Christ and imitate His reverent examples. He alone has seen the Father and can authoritatively teach on how best to

approach the Father. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to pray in this manner in Mt.6:9-15:

Our Father in heaven: Here, everything stands in perspective; the LORD God is our Father, we are His offspring. All His saints have this honour. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God* (1Jn.3:1). Thus our position as God's children stems from His love for us. Such eternal privilege should not be perverted through pride.

Hallowed be Your name: Our heavenly Father merits our devotion. In worshipful fear, we bow in thoughts and will to the God of glory, who alone owns our life and all. In this light, we like Paul can say *blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comforts* (2Cor.1:3).

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: God is absolutely sovereign. *The Lord has established His throne in heaven; and His kingdom rules over all* (Ps.103:19). Thus, it is the desire of every redeemed heart that God's righteous and glorious rule will one day be a reality on earth. We must travail in the place of prayer that His gracious purposes be established in human hearts and in all the earth.

God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim.2:1-4). He desires that the message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ be preached beyond hilly lands and in plains across the oceans

(Acts1:8). It is God's will that faithful labourers be sent out into the field of evangelism for the great harvest of souls (Mt.9:37-38). The Lord Jesus desires that His children grow in grace and in the knowledge of His will (2Pet.3:17-18). May God's intents become the heart cry of every trembling heart. Amen!

Give us this day our daily bread: God provides! He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps.145:16). The LORD God clothes the lilies of the valley; He feeds the birds of the air. We are of more value than they; surely He cares for us.

The needs of life are numerous. We need food, raiment and soundness. And God is willing to meet these needs. *I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat (Mk.8:2).* Those are the gracious words of our Lord Jesus who in the days of His flesh *went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38).*

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors: Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are forgiven sinners (Eph.1:4; Col.1:14). Therefore, it is the will of God that every believer must forgive those who offend them, even as God in Christ forgave them (Eph.4:32). And how did God forgive us in Christ? He did so while we were yet sinners (Rom.5:8).

Christians are to be kind and tenderhearted like their Lord. If and when Christians pray violent prayers against their enemies, wishing them death, sickness, and all forms

of evil, how is the love of God manifest in them? It only shows that they have not forgiven those who offend them. Contrary to God's will, they are cursing their enemies instead of blessing them (Mt.5:43-48). This is not the will of God in Christ!

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one: This is the cry of every trembling heart. Unless sustained by the power of God's grace, believers are no match against the besetting temptations of the enemy of their souls. *For who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression* (Ps.19:13).

And thanks be to God who according to the riches of His glory strengthens us with might through His Spirit in our inner man to know and do His will according to His good pleasure (Eph.3:16; Phil.2:13). The Lord Jesus Christ can help His people in their hours of temptations. *For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted* (Heb.2:18).

Though the evil one has sworn to make war with those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev.12:17), yet we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Rm.8:37). In the Lord Jesus Christ, we have overcome the wicked one (1Jn.2:12-14), because He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1Jn.4:4).

How else should it be? We must indeed come *boldly* – in full assurance – to the throne of grace (Heb.4:16, 10:22). And when we come, our hearts fully trusting in His grace and power, we will *obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Mercy, grace, help, need; these gifts of God belong to the meek and lowly in heart, they belong to those who will learn from Christ, they belong to those who are in *need*; they do not belong to the boastful and proud.

Remember, *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (1Pet.5:5).

7

ON THE COURSE OF THIS WORLD

ON THE COURSE OF THIS WORLD

There is *the course* (path/ordering/pattern) of *this world* (as a system of thoughts and actions). And the *course of this world* is according to the *prince of the power of the air*. This particular *prince of the power of the air* is the *spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience* (See Eph.2:2).

This prince of the power of the air works in the sons of disobedience so as to render them captive to the lusts of their own flesh, *fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind* (See Eph. 2:3).

The *course of this world* is *trespasses and sins* (Eph.2:1; 1Jn. 2:16-17). Therefore, all sinful humanity is in *the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will* (2Tim.2:26).

A CASE OF EPHESIAN BELIEVERS

Ephesian believers (Gentiles like you and me) are now saints and faithful in Christ (Eph.1:2). Though they were once *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph.2:1), now they have been made alive by the Lord Jesus Christ. Like their Colossian brethren, though once *dead in their trespasses and uncircumcision of their flesh*, the Lord Jesus Christ whom they believed has now made them alive *together with Him, having forgiven all their trespasses* (See Col.2:13). What a quickening testimony of God's love and power to deliver from the prince of the power of the air.

Therefore, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have been delivered from the snare of the devil. They have been freed by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan no longer holds them captive to do his will. They have been translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Jesus Christ (See Col.1:13). Amen!

However, Satan remains the prince of this world. He is the ruler of its system of thoughts and actions (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Satan operates in this capacity within the Sovereign purpose of the God of all creations who granted him power and influence to so do for a season. Remember that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt.28:18; Heb.1:3).

ON THE NATURE OF IDOLATRY

Galatians 5:20 presents *idolatry* and *sorcery* as *works of the flesh* that have *demonic influences* as seen in 1Cor. 10:19-21. In essence, there is a demonic connection among all forms of idolatry and sorcery. Fortune telling, household idols, community shrines, and high places of animal sacrifices all attract demonic activities.

The Scriptures speak of CUP OF DEMONS, TABLE OF DEMONS and HAVING FELLOWSHIP WITH DEMONS (1Cor.10:21, 20). The Scriptures also speak of THEIR DRINK OFFERING OF BLOOD (Ps.16:4). Some even SACRIFICED THEIR SONS AND THEIR DAUGHTERS TO DEMONS (Ps.106:37-41; Lev.17:7; 2Kg.16:3, 17:17, 2Kg.21:6; Deut.18:10). Some sacrificed to THE QUEEN OF

HEAVEN (Jer.7:18, 44; 17-18, 25). In these instances, not only were there demonic influences and manipulations, but even the Lord God was provoked by such evil. In the end, it is only God who can deliver from the repercussions of such evil.

These are grave abominations in the history of Israel, and they remain in our days. Israel learned it from the Gentile world around them. Idolatry, sorcery, harlotry, and demonic evils have been around for long. It is not something that is peculiar to Africa and Africans. It is a human phenomenon. Magic and demonic meditations are promoted in the West too. The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1Jn.5:19). Idolatry is essentially demonic.

The Scripture again speaks of being *partakers of the altar through eating of the sacrifices* offered on the altar (See 1Cor.10:18).

The clues in the scriptural references above are not meant by the Lord to stir our curious imaginations and superstitions. The questions raised by those unholy associations bear on our spiritual wellbeing. Are they helpful? Does it edify? These are the questions raised in 1Corinthians 10:23.

In essence, the word of the Lord says,

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or

what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

For you are the temple of the living God. As He has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty (2Cor.6:14-18).

ON DEMONIC ACTIVITIES

DEMONS engage in all forms of cruel, sinful and manipulative activities of their ruling prince, Satan, in dogged opposition of the Lord Jesus Christ and His people. Their intent is to further torment and ruin fallen humanity. Demons are unclean spirits.

In Lk.4:31-37, Jesus, during his teaching in the synagogue, was sharply opposed by an unclean spirit possessing a man. Satan will always oppose the gospel because he knows it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom.1:16).

As seen in Matthew 9:32-33, demon possession can result in abnormal functioning of the physical body of those possessed.

Demon possession can equally affect the minds and emotions of those possessed (Matt.17:15; Mk.5:1; 9:18-27).

Demonic possession, oppression, and vexation are all the orderings of Satan in his slaving system of evil (See Acts 10:38; Lk.6:18; Acts 5:16; Lk.8:36; Acts 8:7; 16:16).

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be possessed or controlled by demons because they are already indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus and God the Father (Rom.8:9; Col.1:27; Eph.4:6) And we have the assurance of the Scriptures that we are of God, and greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1Jn.4:4). In the Lord Jesus Christ, we have overcome the world.

But like Paul the apostle, the Lord may so permit that a child of God be vexed or tormented by a *messenger of Satan*. This will caution the believer from putting confidence in the flesh. It will help the Christian pilgrim to seek God's face and trust His sustaining grace in all situations (2Cor.12:7-10).

ON DEMONIC INFLUENCES

DEMONIC MANIPULATIONS can come through varied means. Consider a case of an occultist who got converted to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. If and when afterwards he or she is ghosted by violent dreams (as is the common encounter of many), such persons need to keep crying for mercy, while daily filling themselves with the word of God. It is through the constant cleansing by the word that such experience, evil imaginations, and wrong values will fade (Jn.15:3; 17:17; Eph.5:26). And

when sudden terrors and trouble indeed come from the wicked, the soul must find its solace in God and His living word (Prov.3:21-26).

Job, the man who fears God and shuns evil, lamented his horrible experiences in his trials. He spoke of wearisome nights and terrifying dreams and visions. Those were part of His trials from the LORD GOD (Job 7).

But there is a God who reveals secrets. If and when a dream is indeed meant to confirm a possible reality, the Lord will make it plain, and confirm it to us in His written word.

Peter saw a *VISION*, likewise Paul, Stephen and John the beloved. If and when it pleases the Lord to reveal something through visions, He will do. But the truth about the vision must be tested in the fire of the word of God. The word of God, when rightly divided, is the believers' more sure word of prophecy to which we all must take heed above all else (2Pet.16-21).

No personal vision or interpretation of the same should contradict the word of God. This is where some are getting it wrong. Many are quick to give heed to superstitions and cunningly devised fables of men in the name of divine revelation. Any divine revelation, no matter how convincing, that cannot stand the scrutiny of the Holy Scriptures is not from the Lord.

Beware of prophets who speak the visions of their own hearts *"And the LORD said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them,*

commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart...Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. (Jer.14:14; 23:16;). The Scriptures are the reliable authority!

"The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD. "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? [Jer.23:28,29]

Observe Paul's discipline in communicating a similar experience. Though he had visions and revelations of the Lord, he was careful not to seek glory through the same. In fact, he confessed to hearing *inexpressible words which it is not lawful for any man to utter* (2Cor.12:1-6). No one knew what he heard till date. If it had mattered, the Lord would have permitted him to say it or put it in writing. Such humility and discipline is greatly needed in our day.

The Scriptures speak of *LYING WONDERS* according to the working of Satan (2Thess.2:9). When Satan showed the Lord Jesus Christ *all the kingdoms of the world and their glory* (Matt.4:8), it was one of His *lying wonders*. But the Lord Jesus Christ knows the truth; He knows *all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and*

the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world (1Jn.2:15-16). The Lord Jesus knows that the world and its glory is passing away. Only the truth can set free from the lying wonders of the enemy.

Therefore, pilgrims beware! Beware of lying visions from Satan meant to unsettle your souls. And sometimes, dreams come when there are many cares (Eccl.5:3).

AN EVIL SPIRIT from the presence of the LORD troubled Saul the King (See 1Sam.16:14-15; Judges 9:23). Rare event like this grant a glimpse into what may transpire in the unseen realm concerning a man. And these things can be from the LORD as a trial of faith as in the case of Job, or as a punishment of evil as in the case of Saul the king.

It is therefore presumptuous to assume we know everything about our lives. However, we are instructed to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, casting all our cares upon Him who cares for us (1Pet.5:6).

The Lord God has promised that *their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more* (Heb.10:17; Jer.31:34). *For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us* (Ps.103:11-12)

So God is not punishing us for already forgiven sins. As for Paul, God showed him *how many things he must suffer for My name's sake* (Acts 9:16). Paul suffered for the sake of Christ and the gospel of His grace unto all men. Paul did not suffer because he was a former

blasphemer or murderer. Those past deeds have been forgiven by the Lord who called Paul by His grace.

Still, the Lord God knows our foolishness, and our sins are not hidden from Him (Ps.69:5). As a consequent judgment of God upon David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah the Hittite, the sword of God's wrath fell on David's house (2Sam.12:9-10). God decided that judgment upon his servant in that particular situation. It is not always like that. God is all wise and all powerful. He alone knows why He dealt with David His servant that way. He alone knows why Moses was not spared because of the error of his anger at the rock (Numb.20).

These few instances are written for our admonition upon whom the end of the ages have come. We should never think God will spare sin at anytime. We must be careful not to provoke the eye of God's glory. Not every erring brother will survive the fierce judgment that came upon the brother mentioned in 1Corinthians 5. Only the Lord knows why He spared that soul in the assembly of the saints at Corinth. Yes, the brother repented (2Cor.2), but Ananias and Sapphira had no such opportunity (Acts 5).

These are fearful realities. It is humbling. We must take heed how we lead our lives. No man lives to himself. Genealogy teaches us this simple truth. Jesus was a great grandson of Rahab the Harlot. What a humbling reality. But God will always remember the poor in spirit for His own mercies' and goodness' sake (Ps.25:7).

A FORMER PROSTITUTE OR THIEF will no doubt have had experiences. The blot of their past life spent in lust and covetousness may not fade so easily. Rahab the harlot endured such blemish even in the history of her faithful testimony of repentance and good works (Heb.11:31; Jms.2:25). Mary Magdalene bore the same lot (Mk.16:9; Lk.8:2). Paul the apostle was not immediately accepted by some disciples because of the details of his past life (Acts 9:26). But no matter our past experiences, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb.2:11). The reproach of those who reproach us falls on Him (Rom.15:3).

In some cases, a prostitute who got converted to the Lord Jesus Christ may have to live with the sorrowful reality of her HIV status. This and other likely events are consequences of past life experiences. They do not nullify the deliverance/salvation of Christ.

The truth is often that once a soul has been delivered from the stronghold of sin and Satan into the kingdom of God and His Christ, such a person immediately resumes the processes of being renewed, transformed, changed, and regenerated into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ in all things. The new birth is both an event and a process. The processes only confirm the new birth. They neither add nor remove anything from the validity of the initial event.

But we must grow. For if we remain babes in our walk and understanding in the Lord, we shall surely be *tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting* (Eph.4:14). Hence the need for us to

grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2Pet.3:18). We must grow up in all things into Him (Eph.4:15).

UNREPENTANCE AND SECRET SINS open up our spiritual edges. We are therefore exposed to assaults from the enemy. If there is no breastplate of righteousness, the heart will be afflicted by unrighteous thoughts and decisions. Like the prodigal son, our departures from the path of truth will duly expose us to hazard. We shall be forced to feed on the portion of pigs. We shall have lost our character as the son of a great king; we shall have spent our inheritance on the passing pleasures of time (Lk.15).

What a warning to never go on forwardly in the way of our heart! *Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by faith (Hab.2:4).* True faith is about trust and obedience. We trust God and obey His word.

In Psalm 32, when the hand of the Lord was heavy on David for sins not confessed, David lost his physical vitality due to troubled conscience. Sometimes, even physical sickness may be the result of sins in our lives as believers. We must be discerning, and endeavor to abide in the will of the Lord.

A New Testament example shows that partaking of the holy communion in an unworthy manner may bring about weakness, sickness, and death (See 1Cor. 11:27-32). Only the Lord God determines the severity of punishment due

each individual guilty of violating this admonition. We must be careful.

THERE IS NO COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE DEAD AND THE LIVING. Luke 16 teaches that no dead will be sent to the living to pass on any message. No dead can come of their own will to inform or torment the living. The word of God is enough to guide our feet in the paths of life. The account in 1Samuel 28 happened as a result of Saul's disobedience. And through it Saul received the fierce judgment of God. God hates mediums. Mediums are the working of Satan through deceiving spirits. Mediums are lying wonders from Satan.

In an event like that of Saul and the witch of En-dor, we must be careful to understand the meaning in the context of the Scriptures. Even the witch seemed surprised at the appearance of the actual Samuel instead of a demonic counterfeit she would expect from her occult techniques. This shows that it was the power of God interrupting her séance to work His purposes.

The Lord Jesus only appeared to His disciples AFTER His resurrection, not during His death. And the records of saints rising from their graves happened in line with Jesus' resurrection (See Matt.27:52-53). It was the public aspect of the testimony of Jesus' resurrection to a hopeless and dying world. In the Lord Jesus, there is hope of life beyond the grave (See 1Cor.15). Jesus saves!

The record says they *appeared to many* (Matt.27:53). They appeared clothed in their resurrection bodies and vanished (See 1Cor.15). Simple!

The Lord Jesus was not a spirit in those instances of His appearance to His disciples (See Mk.16:12; Lk.24:13-43). He was Jesus that ate with His disciples (See Jn.21; Lk.24:36-43). A spirit has no flesh and bones that can be touched (Lk.24:38-40). But Jesus had flesh and bones (Mt.28:9, 16-17; Lk.24:13-43; Jn.20:27).

No doubt the disciples had their own superstitions. They, like us, were full of strange ideologies and beliefs. Matthew 14:26 grants a glimpse into their belief in ghosts. And these ghosts can bring about fear. Eliphaz, one of Job's friends described a scene in Job 4: 12-16. Eliphaz narrated his disquieting experience after seeing "a spirit" pass before his face in a vision of the night.

DANGERS OF SYMBOLS

Keep yourself from idols (1Jn.5:21). Be careful not to make for yourself *any likeness of anything* that takes the place of God in your heart (Ex.20:3-4). The Lord God hates idolatry in any form.

Idolatry is an appeal to what can be seen, felt, and touched. It is simply walking by sight and not by faith in the living God.

In Ezekiel 14:3-6, the Lord warned against setting up idols in our hearts. Exercising faith on any object (sacred or so-called) in place of God is a great evil in the sight of the Lord God.

The whole world has an idolatrous background as seen in Babel (Gen.11). And the Abraham of God was called out from that idolatrous foreground (Acts 7). So there is that tendency in each man to walk by sight and not by faith in the living God. We all are prone to worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever (Rom.1:24-25). Whenever men do this, God will give them over to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts. It is a fearful judgment!

In the days of Moses the Servant of the Lord, the children of Israel preferred the voice of Moses to the voice of God (See Ex.20:18-21). They idolized Moses the servant of the Lord in their vain hearts. And when Moses delayed from coming down the mountain where he had gone to receive instructions from the Lord for them, the children of Israel and Aaron the brother of Moses turned away from the living God unto an idol (See Ex.32). They said, *as for this Moses...we do not know what has become of him* (Ex.32:1). So they built a golden calf and worshipped it. What a great fall from grace unto perdition.

The children of Israel continued in this idolatrous pathway. The Brazen Serpent remained an object of idolatry many years after it was used by God as a symbol of merciful intervention in the time of divine wrath (See Num. 21:5-9; 2Kg.18:4).

In the days of Gideon, the Ephod – a mere sleeveless priestly garment - became an idolatrous object because men's hearts were set in them not to seek the Lord. It was a great snare for the estranged Israel of God and for Gideon the man of valour (Judges 8:22-27; 33-35).

How terrible things can get when men refuse to retain God in their knowledge! Even when the children of Israel ate manna from heaven, and drank from the miraculous supply of water from the rock, they remained carnal and abominable (1Cor.10:1-12). What a great warning for us upon whom the end of the ages have come!

Yet, many leaders among God's people have been sincerely wrong like Gideon. In unholy zeal, they have established needless traditions as guides for God's people. Those traditions overtime have become stumbling blocks in the pathway of God's people unto untold generations. This is a great evil that many are guilty of!

Symbols/Objects/ Activities like *The Blood Of Jesus, The Name Of Jesus, Speaking In Tongues, The Cross/ Sign Of The Cross, Bible As Sword/Headrest For Protection, Picture Of Jesus, Water, White Garment, White Handkerchief, Prayer Mountain, Rod, Church Building, Praying To The Head Or Grave Of Father Or Ancestors, Songs Of Praise And Worship, Quoting The Scriptures Or Using It As Incantations, Fasting And Prayer, Holy Communion As A Healing Formula, Salt And Psalms Inside Water, Burning Candle And Incense, etc.* have become idols in many hearts like in the days of Ezekiel the prophet (See Ezk.14).

The spontaneous move of the Spirit that called for the use of those symbols in particular situations is often

misunderstood by our rigid carnal mentality. Is every sick person healed by *white handkerchief or aprons* (Acts 19:12)? Is every blind eye restored by *mud and spittle* (Jn. 9:6)?

The sun and moon stood still for Joshua in Joshua chapter 8. Of its own accord, a locked iron gate opened for Peter in Acts chapter 12. The spirit of the Lord physically caught Phillip away from a particular location in Acts chapter 8. Is God under compulsion to repeat those signs and wonders in our days? Will another person ever walk on water and still the storm the way Jesus miraculously did? Does the absence of these signs and wonders signal our “spiritual impotence” as a generation of believers? The answer is “No!”

Why then do we often turn the movement of the Spirit into carnal traditions? Why?

It is because we have integrated the Bible within traditional elements. Through our imagined formulas and proper applications of the same, we vainly think God can be manipulated to doing our will. We are so often self-centered, wanting to have our own way at all cost. Our woes are not few!

You will surely say this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country (Lk. 4:23).

Observe how the malice of man is provoking the godness of God. So flawed is our thought pattern like the Israelites

of old. But we cannot put God in a box. Though our hearts may question the sovereign wisdom and will of God in situations, He is far more magnificent than our failing imaginations. We do not have power over Him.

HOW CAN THIS BE?

Many are now *EATING THE BIBLE* literally. You hear them quote Jeremiah 15:16, *Thy Words were found and I did eat them, and Thy Word became to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*

Many, with idolatrous intents, have established their faulty doctrines on the Scripture above. Like Jeremiah the prophet of old, they claimed they can write down Scripture on paper and eat up the paper afterward. They unwisely think by so doing, they would have *found* and *eaten* God's word like Jeremiah. But they are wrong, terribly wrong to think so.

No doubt such actions stem from wrong understanding of God's word. As with any instruction, either written or spoken, the understanding and application must be derived from the intention of the speaker or writer. The intention is *literal* or *figurative*. If *literal*, the instruction can be applied *physically* and *externally*. If the instruction is *figurative*, it can only be applied *spiritually* and *internally*.

Jeremiah 15:16 is a *figurative* expression. Jeremiah in this case was meditating on God's holy precepts. And by so

doing, God's word became the joy and rejoicing of his heart. In like manner, we are commanded to *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom* (Col.3:16). These instructions are to be applied through constant meditation on God's word. Like the psalmist, we then can gratefully proclaim, *oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day* (Ps.119:97).

The Lord Jesus used many figurative terms to describe Himself in particular situations with reference to the salient ideas He wanted to pass across to His listeners. Jesus said *I am the door of the sheep* in John 10:7. This statement is figurative. It does not mean Jesus is a literal physical measured wooden frame found in our homes. Rather, it means Jesus is the true access into the peaceful sheepfold of His people. It is through the Lord Jesus Christ *we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God* (Rom.5:2).

In John 6:35, the Lord Jesus again said *I am the bread of life*. This statement is also *figurative*. The Lord Jesus is not a loaf baked in an oven. Rather, it means receiving the Lord Jesus by faith in His finished work of salvation satisfies the wretchedness of a sinful soul.

Therefore, Scriptures must be understood in their contexts; otherwise, we will fall into the error of wrong understanding and application of the plain truths of the Bible.

SCRIPTURES AS INCANTATIONS

There is a common practice among Christians. When praying or confronted by situations, the response of many is often to quote particular Scriptures/written word of God that fit those situations. This is often done to either claim a promise of God in His word, or reject an evil occurrence that is against God's word/promises.

But the word of God is not a go-to formula or mantra. When we reduce God's word to what can be *used* to influence God or situations, then we are in error already. When we quote Scriptures arbitrarily, thinking to *harness the power in those words* for our benefits, then we are already using the Scriptures as incantations.

There is a very thin line here, and that thin line is *trust* and *obedience*. An idolatrous priest or priestess trust and obey their carefully learned conjurings, and they use these ritual recitations when invoking their gods or idols. The end in view is that their idols or gods will surely answer to their desires. Their idols or gods are bound by the precise conjurations of the priest or priestess. This is the core belief – to use words or incantations to achieve an end/a result.

But a Christian must not approach God with the mindset of an idolatrous priest or priestess. Christianity is more than a “claiming it and rejecting it” crusade. A true walk of faith is a conscious daily obedience to God's word in our hearts and in all our ways. The essence of true biblical faith is trust and obedience. Trust in God in the situation

no matter what! Remember, obedience to God's commandments is central to living a life that pleases God.

The living God is ALL WISE and ALL POWERFUL. Therefore, when we quote Scriptures in particular situations or apply the same in our walk of faith, we are in essence saying we believe in God who is true and whose words are true. We bow to His eternal wisdom and power because that is all we need. We do not quote the Scriptures because we think God can be manipulated by those words. Rather, we apply the word of God because we love and trust in God who never fails.

ABOVE ALL

The words of the LORD are pure words:

As silver tried in a furnace of earth,

Purified seven times (Prov.12:6)

May the words of the LORD scatter our doubts and fears; as wax melts before fire, may our unbelief melt at the presence of the LORD.

Always remember that the enemy is after our heart. It is all about our faith in the Lord. Satan knows that once he tampers with our confidence in God, once he is able to becloud our hearts with doubts, then we are on a gradual decline into the way of disobedience and unrighteousness. Ask Eve.

The greatest battles of our Lord Jesus Christ are battles of FAITH – of trust and obedience in God.

This is the real SPIRITUAL WARFARE: will man trust and obey God?

This is the battle since Eden. This will be the battle to the end of ages. God knows, Satan knows, and you must know.