

Gaining the Victory

*“Behold, I send you
forth as sheep in
the midst of
wolves.”*
—*Matthew 10:16*

AS WE APPROACH THE close of another year, it is not only good that we contemplate with heartfelt thanks the many blessings which the

Lord’s hand has bestowed upon us, but it is also needful to look introspectively at our progress in the narrow way. Such honest self-examination will most likely remind us that we have had both successes and setbacks during the year past in the way of character development and in the display of the fruits and graces of God’s Holy Spirit.

In the process of examining ourselves, we should also be reminded that regardless of how long we have been in the Christian way, there are enemies that we must contend with—enemies which continue to look for our weak points and seek to exploit them. In the words of our opening text, Jesus speaks of his followers metaphorically as “sheep in the midst of wolves.” Conditions in the world are somewhat different today than they were when Jesus sent his disciples out into the ministry and

said that they would find themselves “in the midst of wolves.” Nevertheless, our enemies as Christians are like wolves, willing to devour us spiritually. These enemies, we have come to realize, are three-fold—the world, our fallen flesh, and our most powerful enemy, the devil.

THE WORLD

It is important to note first that when speaking of the world as our enemy, and our fight against it, we should not suppose that we are to do battle with its institutions, governments, social or economic systems. These aspects of the “present evil world” are in the process of falling and will soon give way to the righteous kingdom of Christ. (II Pet. 3:10,13) These are not our battles, but the Lord’s.

The world is our enemy, and we do battle against it, because it has a wrong set of character and moral values, and because its spirit of pride and selfishness will hinder us from making our calling and election sure. It is a spirit that will harm our endeavors to overcome the things that are of little eternal worth. The Apostle John stated emphatically: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—I John 2:15-17

A proper appraisal of true values has emphasized in our minds the verity of the Scripture which says that the “things that can be seen are temporary,

but things that cannot be seen are eternal.” (II Cor. 4:18, *International Standard Version*) Every one of us recognizes as Christians that this is a true presentation of God-like values. To state the matter in perhaps even clearer terms, we might say that the blessings of the world are, at best, only fleeting, while the blessings of God last forever.

Another sense in which the world is our enemy is found in its spirit of indifference—indifference to sin, to one’s fellow man, to honesty as well as integrity, and to personal responsibility. If such a spirit should dwell in the character of the Christian it would likely find its expression in spiritual lethargy, complacency, and an attitude of taking things for granted. The Scriptures warn us of this spirit of lukewarmness, being neither cold nor hot—unconcerned, indifferent to God and our responsibilities to him.—Rev. 3:14-17

In Matthew 13:22 Jesus made this statement: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” In this parable the Master tells us of two very formidable enemies which we meet in the world. Every Christian has certain cares of this life, but the thought of the Greek word translated “care” is that of anxiety and distraction. Though we must look after and manage the cares of this life, if they become distractions to us and cause anxiety, they can easily become an enemy to spiritual growth. Then there is the “deceitfulness of riches.” We can fall victim to the deceitfulness, or delusion, of worldly riches whether or not we actually possess them.

Our Lord told us to watch out for these two foes in the army of this world, because if we do not, they will deceive and outsmart us, and win the battle. They will have us so completely surrounded by thorns that our spiritual life will be choked out. Therefore, they must be fought against wherever they are found.

The cares of this life are found in the home, in our social activities, in our neighborhood contacts, and in our business life. Indeed, we rightfully owe something to every one of these "cares." We owe much to our husband or wife; we owe a proper upbringing and earthly provisions to our children as they grow to adulthood; certainly, also, we owe time and energy to our job and business associates; we owe friendliness and goodwill to our neighbors and all with whom we come in contact.

The question, however, that we have to answer is: Are we so overwhelmed by these otherwise legitimate cares, and the time and energy that are devoted to them, that we deprive God of something that he has a right to expect from us? Borrowing an illustration used by the Lord, are we rendering "unto Caesar" more than is his due? Are we rendering "unto God" less than even his reasonable expectation? (Matt. 22:21) These are heart-searching questions which every Christian must soberly consider.

In I Corinthians 2:12, the Apostle Paul makes this statement: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." If our successful endeavors in the affairs of this life, or in the obtaining of earthly

riches, to any extent seduces us from our consecration and devotion to the Heavenly Father, then to that extent, we will likely be lacking in the use of all the many spiritual “things that are freely given to us of God.”

Our associates in the world may consider us “failures” as they witness our devotion of time and energy to spiritual things. May it be so, for this will indicate “success” to the Lord and to us in the fulfillment of our consecration. Let us remember Paul’s counsel: “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation [Greek: generation], among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life.” (Phil. 2:15,16) If we have fought the battle against the spirit of the world to the extent that we, as lights, are showing forth by our example the “word of life,” then we have gained a measurable victory, and will be “rich toward God.”—Luke 12:21

THE FLESH

The flesh is a daunting enemy of the Christian, with its ambitions, passions, human desires and dreams. The flesh is subject to temptation from without, and so prone to weaknesses from within. Our battle is not merely to control the urges of fleshly gratification or sinful practices, but also includes additional areas. It is a battle of the human nature against the spiritual nature, to which we have been begotten as New Creatures. It is the internal conflict involving proper, wholesome aims and ambitions, to which the world has a legitimate right, versus the goals, desires, hopes and prospects of

the child of God. It is the struggle of self-will against the doing of God's will.

Similar to our battle against the world, a proper appraisal of values is key to approaching our fight against the fallen tendencies of the flesh. As already noted, the things of the flesh are temporal, but the things of God are eternal. The Apostle Paul wrote: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

How can we stimulate the work of being "transformed" into the image of God's dear Son? The next verse helps us along this line. "For I say," Paul continues, "through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly." (vs. 3) Later, in the 16th verse of the same chapter, the apostle, in concluding his argument, says: "Be not wise in your own conceits." In yet another place, Paul admonishes us, saying, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."—Gal. 6:7,8

Many people in the world have an inordinate love of themselves. Noticeably few, however, attempt to fight against this tendency. As Christians, we are not immune to this battle, and must fight "self" to a greater or lesser degree throughout our lives. We

have to fight pride, selfishness, self-will, and other propensities which promote our flesh. As children of God, in humility, we are to depend upon his providential assistance, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to win the fight against our flesh. Paul states, “If through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.”—Rom. 8:13, *New Living Translation*

Further advice in the fight against our fallen flesh is found in these words: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” “For we ... worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. 2:3; 3:3) To follow these instructions is to control the natural pride and selfishness of the flesh and is essential if we would win our battle against this great enemy.

THE DEVIL

Besides the spirit of the world and our fallen flesh, there is our most inherently powerful enemy, the devil. He is a sly, deceitful and wily foe. He has convinced many that he does not even exist, a very enchanting thought to the depraved mind. Then again, he suggests to others that although he exists, he is no worse than God, who he has falsely portrayed as willing to torment masses of mankind forever in a burning hell.

The Apostle Peter wrote: “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith.” (I Pet. 5:8,9) This text of Scripture tells us one of the ways in which we must fight against the

devil, who as a lion is seeking those whom he can devour. Peter says we are to “resist” him, “stedfast in the faith.” Strong faith is a most effective and necessary weapon in battling this great foe. We may liken it to the small pebble from the brook which young David used to slay the giant Goliath.

Indeed, true faith is a powerful force against Satan, the devil. However, he does not give up, but continually attempts to attack our faith by every means possible. He may plant seeds of doubt in our mind; or use his weapon of discouragement; perhaps he will seek to lead us astray by means of error. The devil’s deceptions are indeed many and varied. However, “we are not ignorant of his devices.” Therefore, Paul says, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (II Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11) Let us remain steadfast in the faith, and in our appreciation of the Gospel of the kingdom!

Jesus spoke of some who would hear the word of God, but “then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts.” (Luke 8:12) The devil, our great adversary, has done this to individuals in the past, and he could do so to us, if we do not remain steadfast in the faith. “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”—Heb. 2:1

NOT ALONE IN THE BATTLE

Our battle against the world, our flesh, and the devil is a most challenging one. However, in this warfare we are not alone. If such were the case, we would be defeated almost before the fight started.

Let us, therefore, consider our comrades in this fight, the ones upon whom we can depend—the Lord, the Truth, and our brethren. “With us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles.” (II Chron. 32:8) This one promise in itself is a most powerful argument that the warfare is worthwhile.

“The LORD is my strength.” “I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” (Ps. 28:7; Heb. 13:6; Josh. 1:9) Is there not great consolation in these words? We realize that it is in God’s strength that we will win the conflict. Because the battle rages, decisions have to be made, and sometimes it may seem that we fight alone, but this is not the case. We have never fought alone! No one fights the good fight of faith without divine help, and though we may even walk through the “valley of the shadow of death,” we will “fear no evil: for thou art with me.”—Ps. 23:4

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,” the psalmist continues. Most assuredly, in this battle the Lord is always there. It is our understanding of this that gives us courage to know that we are fighting under the banner of our Heavenly Father and his Son, Christ Jesus, the Captain of our salvation.

To do God’s bidding and to keep his commandments is the heart’s desire of all true Christians. If we continually open our hearts to the promises of God, the promises of help and strength for every time of need, the promises of his providences on our behalf, then we will go forth strong in the realization of the divine goodness manifest toward us.

We will have also the assurances of God's mercy and grace and receive the needed strength daily which these promises have always given to the people of God.

THE TRUTH

We also have the Truth of God's Word, and what a sanctifying power it has been, and continues to be, in our Christian walk. (John 17:17) It has helped us not to be conformed to this world because it has given us an understanding of spiritual values, and it has greatly assisted us in our transformation into the likeness of God's dear Son. It has told us what the will of God is—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect in his sight.

We are thrilled by the words of the hymn:

“Praise to him, by whose kind favor
Heavenly Truth has reached our ears;
May its sweet, reviving savor
Fill our hearts and calm our fears.

Truth, how sacred is the treasure!
Teach us, Lord, its worth to know,
Vain the hope, and short the pleasure,
Which from other sources flow.”

The Heavenly Father has given us fundamental teachings and doctrine in his Word, the Bible. These truths will never change. Let us study them that we might grow in grace and in a knowledge of how to properly apply their righteous principles in our daily Christian life. It is only as we appreciate and internalize these essential elements of the Holy Scriptures that we are able to realize the privileges that we have in connection with them.

THE BRETHREN

We have each other, our beloved brethren, to help us in our spiritual battle as well. The apostle chose his words well when he wrote to those who “have obtained like precious faith.” (II Pet. 1:1) Let us think of the beauty of those words and the effect they have had upon us as a brotherhood in Christ! What a blessing it is to have fellowship with those of “like precious faith.” What great encouragement it has been to us that we have others who can share our fellowship and participate in our mutual love for the Lord, for the Truth, and for one another. Our brethren have often been a source of stimulation when, at times, our own zeal and faith may have lagged.

Due to the weaknesses of our flesh, there are times when we, as brethren, are a source of trial and testing to one another. This is permitted by God and is part of the battle in which we are all engaged. Primarily, these are tests of our character, our motives, and of the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) Let us remember that we are all part of “one body,” and thus seek to help “bear ... one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” (I Cor. 12:12; Gal. 6:2) Let us stand shoulder to shoulder encouraging one another as we fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In Malachi 3:16,17 we read: “Then they that feared [reverenced] the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make

up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

This text of Scripture was written especially for our benefit. We speak often one with another because we need the mutual help and the encouragement which is thus provided. We “forsake not the assembling” of ourselves together because we need the fellowship, support, and love of one another. (Heb. 10:25) Even when we may only be two or three, nevertheless we can rejoice because we have the promise, “They shall be mine ... when I make up my jewels,” God’s special treasure.

Over the course of our Christian walk, the battles we engage in will be won or lost, not by the big things we do, but by the little things—little sacrifices; small expressions of sympathy and encouragement; little acts of unselfish kindness; consideration of others more than ourselves in small ways; little victories over little temptations; taking advantage of small opportunities to witness; small sacrifices of time and energy. If we are faithful in these little things associated with our battle, the big things will come into line under the direction of our Captain, and we will be victorious.

These little victories will attract the Lord more fully into our lives. They will attract the Truth into our hearts with a deeper appreciation of its beauty. They will also attract the brethren into a closer and richer fellowship with us. Let us, then, together with the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren, continue to fight, and by God’s grace, gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”—I Cor. 15:57 ■