

BUILDING A LIFE OF TRIUMPH

A LIFE OF CONSTANT TRIUMPH

God's will for our lives is CONSTANT VICTORY. This is clearly taught in a number of Scriptures.

Consider just a few....

"Thanks be to God Who ALWAYS leads us in triumph in Christ" (2Cor 2:14).

"In ALL THESE THINGS we are more than conquerors through Him, Who loved us" (Rom 8:37).

"These things I write to you so that YOU MAY NOT SIN" (1Jn 2:1).

In spite of these and other scriptures, it is still a difficult task to convince many believers that God wants them to live victorious lives.

If we take Scripture just as it is written and believe it simply, as a little child, then this message will come through to us clearly. But if we rely on our reason, we may find many convincing arguments why such a life is not possible in this evil world. Many unbelieving believers will then add their testimony to what our reason tells us. And then we will convince ourselves that a victorious life is impossible in this world.

Unless we are convinced first of all that God wants us to live in continuous faith, we will never be able to have faith for such a life. And without faith, it is impossible to enter the victorious life. Everything in the Christian life is utterly dependent on faith. And faith is based on the revelation that God has given us in His Word.

Even if you have lived in defeat for many years, it makes no difference. If only you can see this truth of a life of constant victory dearly in God's Word, it would be the first step towards a victorious life.

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF FAITH

1John 2:6 says, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to WALK JUST AS HE WALKED."

How did Jesus walk? Was it in victory SOME of the time or MOST of the time or ALL of the time? We know the answer. He was tempted in all points as we are, but He never sinned.

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

We are now told to walk even as He walked. Is that possible here on earth? Would God tell us to do something that He knows very well we cannot do? No. That is unimaginable. Even earthly fathers do not make unreasonable demands on their children. How much less God! Some of the saddest words written in the New Testament are found in Matthew 13:58: "He did not do many mighty works there BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF."

The parallel passage in Mark 6:5 states, "He COULD do no mighty work there".

He had wanted to do great things for those people in His hometown. But He was limited by their unbelief. Our unbelief makes it impossible for us to receive from Almighty God the good things that He wants to do for us.

I wonder if there have been miracles that God had wanted to do for you, but which He could not do, because of your unbelief. At the judgment seat of Christ, will any of us have to hear these words, "I could not do all that I wanted for you and through you, because of your unbelief"?

What regret there will be in our hearts if this is what we discover at the end of our earthly life! It is good to think about it now.

My early years as a born-again Christian were spent among a group of assemblies that majored in the study of the Scriptures. I am, in one sense, thankful to God for this, for it enabled me to have a good basic knowledge of the Scriptures.

But their study was all through human reason, without the revelation of the Holy Spirit. We studied the Bible as students study chemistry in school.

We discovered the meanings of the Old Testament types, etc., but we were still defeated by sin in our lives. I knew that God had forgiven my sins; but I did not have faith for anything more.

When I saw in the Word the truth of the baptism in the Spirit and began to seek God for it, I found that I just could not believe.

I fasted and prayed and was willing to pay any price for it, but I found it extremely difficult to believe that God had heard my request and granted it. Jesus taught that whenever we pray we should believe that we have already received what we asked for.

“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24).

It took me a long time many years to come to simple, child like faith in that statement. Finally, by God’s grace, I did break through to believe that God had heard my prayer and granted it. I was baptized in the Spirit, by faith. The gift of tongues that followed was then only a confirmation of what I had already received by faith.

As I look back now over those years of struggling, I see clearly that what hindered me was unbelief.

The same principle applies in entering into a life of victory over sin. We can fast and pray and thirst-and still never get anywhere – until we BELIEVE that God CAN and WILL lead us into such a life.

Satan knows that you cannot get anything from God except through faith. So you can imagine how he will try to fill your heart with unbelief. Unbelief is a greater danger than lying or adultery, for these latter are easily recognized as sins, whereas unbelief is not.

Hebrews 3:12 says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God”.

An evil heart of unbelief can cause us to fall away from God. Unbelief is the root cause of all the other sins.

Romans 6:14 states, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

There the Holy Spirit tells us very plainly that if we are under grace, sin cannot have dominion over us. That is so plainly written that even a child can understand it. In spite of that, many believers still do not believe in the possibility of living a life of victory over sin.

God wants you to live in victory. It does not matter how dirty your thought-life is, or how long you have been defeated by anger. The Lord can set you completely free and give you a pure heart. But He cannot do it for you until you believe.

The Bible says that what we believe in our heart we must confess with our mouth.

Romans 10:10 states, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

This is an important principle, for it is through the confession of our mouth that we give expression to our faith. This in turn leads to deliverance from sin’s power. And so we must speak the word of our testimony to Satan, saying, “I believe that God is going to lead me into a life of victory over sin.” Thus we can overcome Satan.

“And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev 12:11).

Keep making that confession, each time you fall, until victory becomes a reality in your life. Do not be discouraged if it does not come overnight. God will surely honor the confession of your mouth.

TAKING GOD’S WORD SERIOUSLY

A bad habit that many believers have is that of taking God’s Word lightly. For example, take Jesus’ words in Matthew 12:36,37:

“For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Most believers do not believe that they will have to literally give an account for every single useless word that they have spoken.

When we really believe this, all backbiting, gossiping, evil-speaking and anger will be eliminated from our lives. All who take these words of Jesus seriously will be radical in cutting out useless words from every part of their speech.

Jesus says here that we will be justified by our words.

We all know about justification by faith. But faith without works is dead, and a faith that does not cleanse our speech is a dead faith.

Think of all the words that you have spoken (or written) during the last three months – at home and in the office, to husband, wife, children, servants, etc. Would a tape recording of your speech prove that you are a justified child of God, different from the world around you? Or would your words be similar to the speech of unbelievers?

The speech of many believers has not been cleansed, because they have not taken the words of Jesus seriously. This in turn is because they do not fear God. They fear men more than they fear God. We cannot hope to make spiritual progress in our life if we do not develop the habit of taking God's Word seriously.

James 1:26 says, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."

If a man cannot control his tongue, his Christianity is worthless -for, as Jesus said, the words we speak show what our heart is like.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt 12:34).

The way we use our tongue is one of the clearest indications of our spiritual condition.

Here is another example: God's Word says that husbands should never be bitter against their wives.

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Col 3:19).

What does that mean?

Does it permit a husband to be bitter against his wife EVEN ONCE?

We know that when God's Word forbids adultery or murder, we must not commit such sins EVEN ONCE. Yet when we read that a husband should not be bitter against his wife, it does not hit us with the same force. Why is that?

It is because we pick and choose which commands of God's Word are serious and which are not. We do not realize that ALL of God's Word must be taken seriously.

Those who take every word of God seriously will mourn over their sin each time they fail. Thus they will find the comfort (strength) of the Holy Spirit, and be led into a life of victory. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5:4).

Here then is another secret of victory:

Take every word of God seriously and mourn over your sin whenever you come short of God's standards.

Thus you will prove that you fear God – and the fear of God is the beginning of that wisdom that leads to a victorious life.

God looks with grace and favor at those who are broken and contrite in their spirit and who tremble at His Word.

"But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isa 66:2).

GOD'S DEALINGS ARE IN LOVE

God has always required obedience to His commandments from man. In the Old Covenant, the Israelites were given commandments to obey. But they discovered that they could not keep God's laws perfectly.

Under the New Covenant, God promises to write His laws in our hearts and minds so that we will not only obey Him, but LOVE to obey Him.

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Eze 36:27).

It is only through obeying His commandments that we can have fellowship with God.

Obedience, however, is something that many believers have not understood. Most believers have so misunderstood “grace” that they consider obedience to be an Old Covenant requirement.

God’s commandments, as a result, are considered to be a heavy burden. This is a satanic deception. It is the result of an ignorance of God’s love.

All of God’s commandments are for our good and are meant to set us free. They all originate in the heart of a God Who loves us perfectly.

Moses says (concerning God giving His laws to Israel at Sinai), “...From His right hand came a fiery law for them. Yes, He loves the people...” (Deut 33:2,3).

The fact that God gives us His law is a proof of His intense love for us.

Some of God’s commandments may require self-denial on our part. But in the long run we will discover that they are for our very best. A father does not give commands to his children to burden them or harm them – but only to help them. This is how we need to see the commands that God gives us too. To have faith is to believe in a God Who is perfect in Love. When we have such faith, we will delight to do God’s commandments, at any cost.

Herein lies the reason for so much of our defeat. The devil has convinced many of us that God’s commandments are either unnecessary, or a burden. If we do not understand why God calls us to do something, that only proves our own immaturity. One day, when we are a little more mature, we WILL understand.

When little children are compelled to go to school, they do not understand why their parents will not allow them to stay at home and play. They may think their parents are being very hard towards them. But it is out of love for the children that the parents compel them to get an education.

Like those little children, we too do not often understand God's ways. But if we believed in His love, we would obey all His Word and submit to all His dealings, without any question.

Consider the matter of suffering. Why does a God of love allow us to go through suffering?

That is because suffering is a part of the syllabus (curriculum) in our spiritual education. It is through suffering that God leads us on to maturity. If you have not had much opportunity to suffer, you certainly could not have learned much in life that has any spiritual value.

Perhaps you grumbled and complained so much the last time you had a little suffering, that God has allowed you to go your own way now. That is sad, when God puts you on the shelf like that. I'd rather go through suffering every day of my life than be set aside by God on a shelf.

It is foolish to compare ourselves with others, when God leads us through the pathway of suffering. That would be like your children wondering why they have to go to school when the children in the slums can play in the mud all day.

All of God's dealings with us are in perfect love. He wants us to be happy -not with the superficial, frothy happiness of the world, but with that deep, everlasting happiness that comes through holiness of life. And there is just no way to be holy except through suffering.

"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Heb 12:10).

Jesus was the happiest man that ever walked this earth. Yet He was the One Who suffered the most. His happiness came out of doing the will of His Father -not by having an easy way through life.

He knew His Father as perfect Love and so He joyfully submitted to all that the Father sent His way. That was the secret of His whole life.

GOD LOVES US AS HE LOVES JESUS

The root cause of all our spiritual problems lies in our not knowing God as a loving Father and a Sovereign God.

One truth that has revolutionized my Christian life is the glorious revelation that Jesus gave us, that the Father loves us just as the Father loved Him.

Jesus prayed to the Father, "...that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:23).

Jesus prayed here that the world around us might know this truth. But it has to grip our hearts first, before the world can realize it.

All Christians believe theoretically in a loving Father in Heaven. But the fact that they are often worried and anxious and so full of insecurity and fear, proves that they do not believe it deep down in their hearts.

There are fewer still that would dare to believe that God loves them AS MUCH AS HE LOVES JESUS! None of us could dare to believe such a truth if Jesus had not plainly told us that it was so.

Once your eyes are opened to this glorious truth, it will change your whole outlook on life. All murmuring and depression and gloom will vanish from your life altogether. I know this can happen, for it happened in my life.

I lived in bondage to depression for many years and was defeated. That was not God's will for me; but I just could not break free from it. Things have been different for me ever since my eyes were opened to the truth that God loves me just as He loves Jesus.

I now see that everything that comes my way has come from the hand of a loving Father. I have seen that He cares for me as the apple of His eye; and so no circumstance in life can ever make me grumble or get depressed now. I have learned, as Paul says, the secret of being content and praising God in all my circumstances.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil 4:4). "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Phil 4:11).

This is now the unshakeable foundation of my life: GOD LOVES ME JUST AS HE LOVES JESUS.

It is not because you do not fast and pray sufficiently that you are not entering into the victorious life. Victory comes not through self effort but through faith. "Faith in what?", you may ask. Faith in God's perfect love for you.

Many believers live under the condemnation of Satan who keeps telling them, "You are not fasting enough. You are not praying enough. You are not witnessing enough. You are not studying the Bible enough," etc.

They are constantly being deceived by such thoughts into an endless round of activity and into a multitude of dead works.

Do you realize that all your self discipline, fasting, praying, tithing and witnessing are dead works, if they do not originate in love for God? And they cannot originate in love unless you are secure in God's love first.

Paul's prayer for the Christians of Ephesus was that they might be rooted and grounded in the love of God.

"...that He would grant you ... to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love..." (Eph 3:16,17). And "to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19).

The Ephesian Christians were already converted and baptized in the Spirit. Yet they needed to be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man so that they might be rooted and grounded in God's perfect love for them, understanding the length, breadth, height and depth of that love. It is only then that Paul goes on to speak of the gifts by which the Body of Christ can be built up.

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ" (Eph 4:7,11,12).

That perfect security in the love of God must be underneath us always. We must be rooted and grounded in it, if our ministry is to be effective.

Elsewhere, the New Testament speaks of this as "that rest". "For we who have believed do enter that rest," the apostle says (Heb 4:3). He then urges us to strive with all our hearts to enter this rest.

“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (Heb 4:11).

It is easy to fall away when we are not “resting” in perfect security in the love of God.

The world is full of people who are looking for someone to love them. Many Christians go from church to church, wanting to be loved. Some seek love in friendships and some in marriage. But this entire search can end in disappointment.

Like orphans, the children of Adam are insecure and as a result are again and again overcome by bouts of self-pity. The sad thing is that even after conversion, many still remain insecure, when there is no need for them to be so.

What is the answer of the Gospel to this problem? The answer is to find our security in the love of God. Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that the hairs on their head were all numbered and that a God Who fed the millions of birds and clothed the millions of flowers would certainly take care of them.

A greater argument than all of that is: “He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us ALL THINGS” (Rom 8:32).

As God wed for Jesus, He will care for you too.

One reason why God allows us to be disappointed at times with our fellow human beings, is so that we might learn to stop leaning on man. He desires to free us from such idolatry (for it is a form of idolatry to depend on man), so that we might learn to lean wholly upon Him alone.

And so when God arranges your circumstances in such a way that you are disappointed on every side, that should not discourage you. It is just God weaning you away from the arm of flesh so that you might learn to live by faith in Him.

Learn to find your security in the fact that God loves you as He loves Jesus.

All competition and jealousy among Christians arises out of our own insecurities (lack of faith). We must be secure in the love of God. That is, we must have faith that God loves us.

I must believe (have faith) that God made no mistake in making me the way He made me. I must believe (have faith) that God gave me my unique gifts and talents.

When a man has faith (believes) that all this is true of him, that man can never be jealous of another or compete with another.

Understanding this solves all problems of relationships among leaders and the believers.

Just think how many of your problems will be solved when your eyes are opened to this one truth that God loves you exactly as He loves Jesus.

GOD HAS A PURPOSE IN EVERY TRIAL

Life becomes wonderful when we see that God has a purpose -a glorious purpose -in everything He permits to come into our lives. When He says “no” to our prayers, that too is an answer that comes from a heart of perfect love.

When God sent fiery serpents to bite the Israelites in the wilderness, was that out of love?

“So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died” (Num 21:6).

That was certainly an act of love, for that was the means that God used to make those Israelites repent and turn back to Him so that He could bless them, but He could not do so until they had repented.

“I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29:11).

One reason why God has permitted this world to be an uncomfortable place to live in -with disease and sickness and poisonous snakes, etc. -is so that people may turn to Him in their distress, so that He might bless them.

And so we can see how God uses even the evil (that Satan causes) to work for the furtherance of His purposes.

When, in eternity, we meet all those who have been ransomed from sin, and hear their stories, we will discover more fully how God used snakebites, financial difficulties, cancers, etc. to turn people away from sin to become His children. We will also hear how God used suffering to sanctify His children so that they might partake of His nature.

In that day, we will thank God for many things that we could not understand here on earth. But the man of faith does not have to wait until that day. He believes in God's wisdom and love right now -and so he has already begun to give thanks for everything.

The ultimate purpose in all of God's dealings with us is that we might partake of His nature. God works all things together for our good -the good being that we might be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:28,29).

Why does God allow us a t times to lose money accidentally, or to be cheated by unscrupulous people? Many of us have had the experience of having our pockets picked in crowded trains and buses.

I have always made it a point to pray for the thief or the cheat on such occasions.

But apart from that, God also desires to detach us from an excessive attachment to money and material things. He does not want us to be so calculating that we worry over every portion that we lose and rejoice over every bit that we gain! He wants us to find our joy in Him – a joy that cannot be increased by any material gain or decreased by any material loss.

Jesus walked on earth like that-and we are called to walk even as He walked. The Bible says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

If someone had given Jesus a gift of ten thousand denarii, out of gratitude for His ministry, that would not have increased Jesus' joy even slightly. His joy in His Father was already full and overflowing.

At the same time, Jesus' joy would not have decreased through any material loss either. For instance, Judas Iscariot was of ten stealing money that came as gifts to Jesus. Jesus knew about it, but He never let the loss of the money disturb His own peace and joy. Jesus must have been very concerned for Judas, since the love of money ruined Judas completely. Nevertheless, Jesus never allowed the loss of the money itself to disturb His own joy.

What a different story it is today with many preachers and healers. Their joy goes up and down together with the amount of each offering! But let us leave the preachers and healers alone! What about us?

Can our joy be increased or decreased by material things? If this is so in our life, then we need to judge ourselves, with fear and trembling. We are on a dangerous course and we need to remove such a materialistic attitude from our life, from our salvation.

If you are really in earnest about partaking of the life of Jesus, God will allow a thousand and one things to happen to you, in order to deliver you from the love of material things, from seeking the honor of men, from self-pity and many other un-Christian attitudes.

He will not compel you to go that way if you do not want to. If you are content to live the substandard, defeated life that most believers around you live, He will leave you alone.

But if you are thirsting for God's best, He will deal with you strongly, cutting out the "cancers" that are ruining you and destroying the idols that corrupt you. He may allow you to suffer pain, disappointment, loss, shattered hopes, humiliation, unjust criticism, etc., in order to bring you to that place of stability - where you cannot be shaken any more.

Then it will not make any difference to you thereafter, whether you are rich or poor, criticized or praised, honored or dishonored. Having gone down into the death of Christ to everything of this world, you would have partaken of the life of Jesus that causes you to walk like a king on this earth.

"Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2Cor 4:10).

Few find this way to the abundant life in Christ because few are willing to pay the price – of total death to self. We cannot live by faith if we do not die to self.

If we are unwilling to be crucified with Christ, our knowledge of God's perfect love will always remain theoretical. We cannot be the disciples of Jesus if we do not forsake everything of this world.

Jesus said, "Whoever of you does not forsake all that lie has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

We looked at John 17:23 earlier: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

Jesus was not praying there for the world or for carnal Christians. He was praying for His eleven disciples who had forsaken everything to follow Him. THOSE disciples could find a security in the Father's love that carnal Christians and worldly people could never know.

What is it that causes a certain Christian to be a "carnal Christian"? Is it not because the devil has deceived him into thinking that he can be happier by not yielding himself totally to God? The carnal Christian tries to get "the best of both worlds" (as some say). But this is a deception; he actually fails to get the best of either world.

If we believed in God's perfect love, we would gladly give up everything for Him, unreservedly. We would then be totally free from anxiety.

Philippians. 4:6,7 commands us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Carnal Christians are always wondering whether their boat will sink in the middle of the storm.

Jesus could sleep right through the storm, because He was secure in the love of His Father. He knew that the devil could not drown Him so easily. His Father was watching over Him all the time.

How wonderful life becomes when we realize that to the same extent that the Father loved and cared for Jesus, He loves and cares for us too.

When we finally see God, we will be surprised to discover how much greater His love for us was than we had ever imagined. We will then realize how foolish all our anxieties were.

But what will be the benefit of realizing it then? NOW is the time to have our eyes opened to the fact of God's love and to live by faith.

YOU CANNOT BE TESTED BEYOND YOUR ABILITY

1Corinthians 10:13 is a glorious verse. There is a tremendous comfort in it for all of us. It says, "...God is faithful, Who will NOT ALLOW YOU TO BE TEMPTED BEYOND WHAT YOU ARE ABLE, but with the temptation [trial] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

People often say that they are going through unbearable trials and sorrows. That may be true for the children of Adam, but it is certainly not true for the children of God --for God watches carefully over every trial and temptation that comes their way.

Satan and those who hate us may desire to trouble us in many ways. But they cannot get at us without our permission or God's permission. Even in the Old Testament, Satan realized that God had put a hedge around Job so that no evil could touch him.

Satan told God, "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land" (Job 1:10).

But, for Job's sanctification, God allowed that hedge to be opened up just a little, and Satan was permitted to attack him. The extent of the opening in the hedge was, however, determined by God. It was opened a little bit initially (Job Chapter 1) and a little more later on (Job Chapter 2).

The Sabeans and the Chaldeans who stole Job's property had all come through the opening that God had made in that hedge.

“When the Sabeans raided them and took them away -indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword... ‘The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword ...’” (Job 1:15,17).

The storm that blew down the house on Job’s children also came through that same opening in the hedge. The opening, however, was not wide enough for disease to come through to attack Job’s body. But later, when God opened up the hedge a little more, disease too could come through and afflict Job. Job did not realize initially that God was in control of everything that was going on. He realized it much later (at the end of the story). But we cannot blame him, for he did not have the written Scriptures, as we have.

But now we have the Word of God to show us Who controls the opening in the hedge.

The hedge is actually God Himself as a wall of fire around us.

“For I, says the Lord, will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst” (Zech 2:5).

But, as we read in the Old Testament about Elisha’s servant, our eyes are often blind and we do not see the wall of fire that surrounds us. Elisha, however, saw it and so he had no fear.

”And when the servant of the man of God [Elisha] arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’

“So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

“And Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2Ki 6:15-17).

The servant was terrified because he could not see what Elisha saw. When Elisha prayed for him, his eyes were opened. Then he came to rest. We need to have our eyes opened too.

God knows when to close up the hedge, too. He controls our circumstances very carefully and exactly, according to our spiritual capacity and according to our eagerness to press on to His highest.

When we are spiritually immature and weak, God will not allow us to be tempted by any massive temptation. Neither will He allow Satan to attack us too violently. At the same time, if God sees that we are not interested in His purpose for our lives, He will allow us to have an easy way through life. The loss will then be ours in eternity.

It was because Job was one of God's chosen servants that God allowed him to face such intense suffering. God will not allow that in everyone's life, for few have matured to the place where they can bear it. Very few are interested in such spiritual maturity, in any case.

Jesus was taken by His Father through every possible temptation that we can ever face. It was by this way that He became perfect.

See Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Look at Hebrews 5:7-9 as well: "...in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience from the things which He suffered."

"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

That is how Jesus completed His education as a man and became perfect. There is no other way for us to be perfect either.

The fact that God will not ever allow us to be tempted or tried beyond our ability is the reason why we can be sure that we can live in victory ALL THE TIME. If it were not for God's guarantee given to us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, we could not have had such confidence.

God guarantees that every trial and temptation that comes our way is conquerable. Why then do we fail? Because we do not take the way of escape that God offers us in each trial and temptation.

What is that way of escape?

It is to HUMBLE OURSELVES – as Jesus did.

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8).

This is the narrow way to the abundant life that few find. Pride is so deeply rooted in the flesh, that few find this glorious way of humility -or even understand what it means to humble oneself. This is indeed a mystery -but God will reveal it to all who are wholehearted.

We may think that it is the pressures of life that make life unbearable for us. Actually, it is our pride – the high thoughts that we have about ourselves – that makes life difficult.

God desires to reduce us. He has to reduce us to NOTHING in our own estimation, before He can fulfill His purpose through us.

Why, for example, do we get offended with others?

Is it not because we have a high opinion about ourselves and about our rights? We feel that people are not giving us the respect that we deserve, or perhaps that they are taking away our rights.

We feel offended when people speak evil about us behind our backs. It is our bloated pride that causes us such suffering. Prick that balloon of pride and when we are truly deflated, we will find that there is no pressure at all.

That is the secret.

May God open our eyes to see it.

While people around us are complaining about a thousand and one things, we will have no complaints whatsoever -because we have taken the way of escape, by humbling ourselves.

GOD GIVES HIS GRACE ONLY TO THE HUMBLE

There is another reason why God wants us to humble ourselves-and that is in order to give us His grace.

God will not violate His own laws -and one of the laws that He has instituted and will maintain, is to resist the proud and to give grace to the humble: "...all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1Pet 5:5).

However much He may love us, He cannot give us His grace if we are proud. And if we do not get grace from God, we cannot live in victory.

There are two kinds of grace – two meanings for this word.

(1) The most common definition of the first meaning of grace is "unmerited favor" or "receiving the opposite of what we deserve".

(2) The second definition of this word is "divine enablement" or "personal empowerment". That is, God enables and empowers us to do something we could not otherwise do without His "grace".

The power of temptation can be overcome only by the power of God's grace. "The Law was given through Moses, but grace ... came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Under the Law (the Old Covenant), people struggled and struggled against temptation in their hearts, but were always defeated.

Saul of Tarsus lived a perfect life according to the EXTERNAL standards of God's laws. In Philippians 3:6, he gives his testimony concerning his own life: "Concerning the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless."

Yet Paul found that he was powerless against lust and covetousness in his heart. He says in Romans 7:8, "But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire."

The Law could not empower people to keep their hearts pure from lust. It was not meant to. The Law was meant only to show man his sinfulness and his helplessness against the lusts of the flesh, and to keep him from external sin through the fear of punishment.

A man could have a perfect life externally, in the eyes of men, through the Law. Yet his heart could be like a sewer of sin! That was the best that the Law could accomplish.

But the good news of the New Covenant through Jesus Christ is that what the Law could not do, grace can. God's grace is not just His undeserved favor in forgiving our sins. It is more than that. It is God's power!

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, 'grace' is equated with power.' "...My GRACE is sufficient for you, for My STRENGTH is made perfect in weakness."

This grace (power) comes to help us when we are tempted. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find GRACE TO HELP in time of need."

"It is good that the heart be ESTABLISHED BY GRACE" (Heb 13:9). Then we can keep our heart from being defiled by lust and covetousness. This is the good news of the New Covenant.

In Hebrews 8:10 God says, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts". God does this in our minds and hearts through the SPIRIT OF GRACE.

Through grace, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Thus, "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled IN us" (Rom 8:4).

This was the main purpose for which God poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It was the 'Spirit of grace' that was poured out "on the inhabitants of Jerusalem ..." (Zech 12:10).

That river is still flowing as a river from God's throne to earth today. The inhabitants of God's heavenly Jerusalem (the Church) may still swim in that river and be covered by its water, immersed in God's grace.

This enabling, empowering river of grace covers, protects and cleanses us. If you understand and accept this, then the promise in Romans 6:14 will be fulfilled: "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but UNDER GRACE [immersed in grace and empowered by grace]."

There is only one condition to enter this river -and that is that WE humble OURSELVES. I hear church leaders praying, "Lord, humble me!" The Bible says humble YOURSELF! "Humble YOURSELVES under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1Pet 5:6).

Grace can empower and enable us to live above sin, over our circumstances, over depression, over bad moods, over Satan, over bitterness, over hatred, jealousy, lust and every other evil if we will just humble ourselves under THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD.

What is the MIGHTY HAND OF GOD that we are to humble ourselves under? It is the hand that orders all the circumstances and people that cross our daily path.

To humble ourselves is to gladly submit to all of God's dealings with us -in all our circumstances and even when He allows people to treat us badly.

We need never fear that this will become too much for us to bear, for God is watching the "gap in the hedge" (see Job 1:10) and knows how much to open at a time. He also knows when to close it.

If we are overcome by any sin, there can be only one reason for our being defeated -our PRIDE. God only gives grace to the humble. We cannot overcome sin if God does not give us grace. And God does not give us grace when we are proud.

Each time we find ourselves defeated we need to go to God and say, "Lord, show me where the pride lies in me that hindered You from giving me grace to overcome." If we are quick to humble ourselves in each failure, victory can be ours in a very short time.

Victory over sin is our birthright under the New Covenant. Do not let Satan deprive you of it through ignorance or pride.

If our victory is delayed, it is because we are slow to respond to the pressure of failures that God allows and that will finally cause us to humble ourselves. It takes time for us to be willing to shatter the self-assertiveness and self-confidence that we, as children of Adam, are filled with.

One form of pride is to think that we have the strength to overcome sin. Wrong teaching some times gives us self-assurance that we can obtain victory by just having a little more determination, a little more self-discipline, a little more prayer and fasting and a little more Bible knowledge.

If we can only do this, we think that now we have grasped the doctrine and victory will be easy. We go forth with great confidence, but we do not realize

yet that our confidence is still in ourselves and not in God's grace. And lo and behold, we fail miserably.

But do you think that we learn the lesson with one fall? No, we do not. And so God has to allow us to fall again and again repeatedly until one day we give up all hope of ever getting victory because we have fallen so often, despite all our good resolutions. That is the zero-point, at which God can lead us into the promised land of victory.

In the Old Testament, God brought the Israelites who left Egypt to the borders of the Promised Land two years after they had left Egypt. But they could not enter in because of their unbelief (see Numbers Chapters 13 and 14).

And so God allowed those proud, self-confident Israelites to wander in the wilderness for another "thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war [symbolizing the strength of self] was consumed" (Deut 2:14).

Then they came to a zero-point. And then they could enter in. Then the Jerichos fell before them, without any effort on their part.

God has to reduce us to zero before He can do His work in and through us. It does not have to take forty years. You can enter in much faster if you will deal ruthlessly with your own pride, and if you are determined to humble yourself at any cost.

As long as we keep blaming our circumstances or other people, we can never hope for victory. But if we humble ourselves, believing that God controls all our circumstances and that no temptation will ever be too much for us to overcome, then victory is assured.

GOD CONTROLS OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

For our faith to be unshakeable, it must rest securely on three facts concerning God:

1. His perfect love,
2. His absolute power and
3. His perfect wisdom.

If we are convinced about His love, we must be equally convinced about His sovereign power as well. That is why Jesus taught us to preface our prayers by addressing God as “Our Father in Heaven” (Matt 6:9). “Our Father” reminds us of His perfect love, and “in Heaven” reminds us that He has absolute power. He is God! And in His absolute sovereignty, He has power to rule over and control everything that happens on earth.

Being God, He is also perfectly wise, and so orders our ways perfectly according to His wisdom.

“As for God, His way is perfect [His wisdom is perfect] ...and [He] makes my way perfect [He orders my circumstances perfectly)” (Ps 18:30,32).

If God were not perfect in love, power and wisdom, our faith would not have an adequate foundation to rest on. But because He is all three of these qualities — we need never be shaken.

Faith is the leaning of the human personality on God in total confidence in His perfect love, His absolute power and His perfect wisdom.

We will all readily acknowledge that God’s wisdom is perfect His ways are as much higher than ours as heaven is above earth.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8,9).

That is why we cannot often understand the way He works or the way He orders our affairs. If a child cannot understand all the ways of his father, then it is not surprising if we cannot understand all of God’s ways either.

As we grow spiritually and partake more of the Divine nature, however, we will begin to understand more and more of God’s ways.

Many believers doubt the total sovereignty of God over all people and circumstances; they do not believe it “works” in the situations of daily life.

Yet the Scriptures are full of examples of how God worked sovereignly on behalf of His people-and often in the most unlikely ways.

Many of us are familiar with the obviously miraculous ways in which God worked on behalf of His people -such as the deliverance of the Israelites from

Egypt, etc. But we have often missed seeing the greater miracles by which God turned the tables on Satan when Satan attacked God's people.

The case of Joseph is a classic. God had a plan for that eleventh son of Jacob to make him the second ruler in Egypt by the time he was thirty.

Joseph was a God-fearing lad and therefore' Satan hated him; Satan then influenced his elder brothers to get rid of him. But God ensured that they did not take Joseph's life.

They managed, however, to sell him off to some Ishmaelite traders. But where do you think those traders took Joseph? To Egypt, of course! That was the fulfillment of Step One in God's plan!

In Egypt, Joseph was bought by Potiphar. This too was arranged by God. Potiphar's wife was an evil woman. Taking a fancy to Joseph, she tried to entice him again and again. Finally, when she found that she could not succeed, she accused Joseph falsely and had him cast into jail.

But whom do you think Joseph met in the jail? Pharaoh's cupbearer! God had arranged for Pharaoh's cupbearer also to be jailed at the same time so that Joseph could meet him. That was Step Two in God's plan.

God's third step was to allow Pharaoh's butler to forget about Joseph for two years.

"Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him... Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream... Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh ..." (Gen 40:23;41:1,9).

That was the time, according to God's timetable, for Joseph to be released from prison.

Psalm 105:19,20 says, "Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him. [Then] the king sent and released him..."

Joseph was now thirty years old. God's time had come. And so God gave Pharaoh a dream. And God reminded the butler also of Joseph as the interpreter of his dream. Thus Joseph came before Pharaoh and became the second ruler in Egypt.

God's timing of events in Joseph's life could not have been more perfect!

We would never have thought of arranging things the way God did. If we had the power to plan Joseph's life, we would probably have prevented people from doing him any harm. But the way God did it was better.

It is a far greater miracle when the evil that people do to us is turned to fulfill God's purposes for us! God takes great delight in turning the tables on Satan, so that all things work together for the good of His elect.

Let us apply these events to our circumstances.

What should our attitude be to evil men, to people who are jealous of us, to those who accuse us falsely, to friends who promise to help us but forget, or to being thrown into jail unjustly?

Do we believe that God is sovereign enough to use all these people and everything they do – whether done deliberately or accidentally -to work together for the fulfillment of His purpose for our lives? If He did that for Joseph, will not He do it for us too? He certainly can and He will.

But I will tell you who could have ruined God's plan for Joseph's life. Only one person – and that was Joseph himself. If he had yielded to Potiphar's wife's enticement, God would certainly have set him aside.

There is only one person in the universe that can spoil and frustrate God's plan for your life – and that is you yourself. No one else can do it. Not your friends and not your enemies. Not angels and not Satan. Only you.

Once we see this, it will liberate us from a great many of our fears and from wrong attitudes towards those who harm us.

It may be good to look at one more example from the Old Testament, so that our minds can be firmly established in this truth.

In the Book of Esther, we read how God rescued the Jews from being slaughtered as a race (from genocide). But it is amazing to see how God did it -through one small incident. The king could not sleep one night. That sleepless night saved the Jews.

Wicked Haman and his wife weren't sleeping that night either; they were plotting how to get the king's permission to hang righteous Mordecai on a gallows. This would be the prelude to destroying all the Jews.

But while Haman and his wife were making their wicked plans, God was working on behalf of Mordecai too. “He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps 121:4).

So God kept the king awake. “That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king” (Esth 6:1).

The king listened to his nation’s history for many hours, until the day began to break. Then the reading came to the place where it was recorded that Mordecai had once saved the king from being assassinated. The king asked his servants what honor had been bestowed on Mordecai for this, and they replied that nothing had been done.

God’s timing of events was again perfect. At that very moment Haman walked in, planning to ask the king for permission to kill Mordecai by hanging.

Before Haman could open his mouth, the king asked Haman what he thought could be done for one whom the king desired to honor. Haman, conceited man that he was, thought that the king was referring to him, and so suggested a great parade of honor for such a man. “Go and do that for Mordecai, quickly,” the king said.

How wonderfully our God can turn the tables on Satan. Haman finally hung on the very same gallows that he had made for Mordecai.

The Bible says, “Whoever digs a pit [for another] will fall into it [himself]. And he who rolls a stone [at another] will have it roll back on him [to crush him]” (Prov 26:27).

In this story, Haman is a type of Satan who is always planning some evil against us. God will not stop him, because God has a far better plan. He wants to turn the tables on Satan. The pit that the devil digs for us will be the one that he himself finally falls into.

Zephaniah 3:17 says: “The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Mordecai was sleeping peacefully that night, quite ignorant of all the wicked plans that Haman and his wife were making against him.

I have two questions for you.

(1) Would Mordecai have slept just as peacefully, even if he had known of Haman's wicked plans? Possibly not, because no doubt he was like you and me. We worry about what we have knowledge of. When God hides the danger from us, we do not worry or fret.

But, the second question is this:

(2) Could Mordecai have slept just as peacefully if he had known of Haman's wicked plans? He could have if he had strong faith that God was on his side and that when his enemies were plotting his death, God was executing a counter-plan to protect him.

We know Peter had this kind of faith. The night before he was to be executed by Herod, Peter slept peacefully in prison, knowing that God was silently planning for him in love. At the right time, God's angel came and woke up Peter and set him free (Acts 12:6,7).

We too can sleep peacefully each night, irrespective of what people or demons may be trying to do to us -if we believe in the total sovereignty of God over every thing and everyone.

Once we have seen the sovereignty of God, we will stop blaming people for anything. We will no longer be afraid of Satan, fearing that he might harm us in some way. We will not be afraid of sickness or disease or anything else in this world.

The Bible tells us to give thanks for everything, in all circumstances and also for ALL PEOPLE.

"Giving thanks always FOR ALL THINGS to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:20).

"IN EVERYTHING give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1Thess5:18).

"Therefore I exhort first of all that giving of thanks be made for all men" (1Tim 2:1).

We can do this meaningfully, only when we have accepted the absolute sovereignty of God.

God cares for us as He cared for Jesus. The same grace that helped Jesus, the same power of the Holy Spirit that enabled Him to overcome is now available to us.

Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Him, His disciples forsook Him, the multitude turned against Him, He was unjustly tried, falsely accused and led out to be crucified. And yet on the way to Calvary, He could turn to the multitude and say, “Do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Luke 23:28).

There was not a trace of self pity in Him.

He knew that His Father had sent the cup that He was drinking. Judas Iscariot was only the messenger who had brought the cup. And so He could look at Judas with love and call him “Friend.” You will not be able to do that, unless you have faith in the total sovereignty of God.

Jesus told Pilate, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11).

It was this assurance that enabled Jesus to walk through this world as a king, with dignity. He lived with that spiritual dignity and died with that same spiritual dignity.

Now we are called to “walk just as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:6). As He “witnessed the good confession” before Pilate (1Tim 6:13), we too are to make our confession before an unbelieving generation (Phil 2:14,15).

Paul tells Timothy in 1Timothy 6:13,14, “I urge you in the sight of God Who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus Who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing”.

As we have already seen, the ultimate good that God desires for us is to make us partakers of His nature, of His holiness. In His marvelous sovereignty, He uses everyone who crosses our path for our good, to fulfill His purpose. That is why we can give thanks for ALL men.

Why does God allow that troublesome neighbor, that nagging relative and that tyrannical boss to keep harassing you? He can easily remove them elsewhere or even take away their lives, and thus make life more comfortable for you.

But He does not do any such thing. Why? Because He wants to use them to sanctify you. And very often, He wants to save them too – through you.

Praise God that our victory is never dependent on the type of people we are surrounded by – whether in our home or office or anywhere else. Our victory is entirely dependent on God's grace. And that grace can be ours in every situation, if we humble ourselves.

ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE

The sum and substance of all that we have been saying thus far is that all of our salvation is BY GRACE and THROUGH FAITH.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

We began our Christian life – receiving forgiveness of sins and the baptism in the Spirit – by grace, through faith. One day when Jesus Christ our Lord returns in glory, we will be caught up to meet Him in the air. That too will be by grace and through faith.

So, the beginning and the end of our Christian life on earth are by grace and through faith. What we need to learn is that everything in between is also to be received on the same principle. By grace, through faith, we can overcome everything evil, and fulfill our God-appointed task on earth.

God knows all the future. There is nothing that is going to happen to us tomorrow or next week or next year that can surprise God. He knows the end from the beginning. This should give us great comfort. For if God knows that you are going to be faced with a massive trial or temptation tomorrow or next week, He will certainly give you grace to cope with it.

The Lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...” (2Cor 12:9).

His grace IS sufficient for every need.

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2Cor 9:8).

Grace is available in abundance to help us in our time of need.

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Whatever your need might be, God’s grace is available to help you meet it. We are, therefore, invited to come **BOLDLY** to the throne of grace to receive that grace.

We have been defeated in the past, because we have not received that grace. The story can be different in the future. If we humble ourselves and cry out for grace in our time of need, God will not disappoint us.

The Bible says that those who receive abundance of grace will reign in life through Jesus Christ.

“For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17).

That was God’s will for Adam- that he might have dominion and rule over everything.

Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; **LET THEM HAVE DOMINION ...**’”.

Adam’s disobedience prevented God’s wonderful purpose from being fulfilled in his life.

But now God has raised up a new race (family) on earth: the sons of God who live by faith in Jesus Christ, and are to live with the dignity of kings and reign on earth.

We no longer need to allow sin to have dominion over us, if we will humble ourselves and receive God’s grace.

No fear or anxiety need ever again enter your heart.

No one on earth can make life miserable for you any more -not your boss, not your neighbor, not your relatives, not your enemies, not Satan, no one; for you have learned the secrets of victory.

Thanks be to God Who always leads us in His triumph in Christ.

How wonderful it is to live under God's New Covenant of grace!

The Promised Land lies open before you!

Go in and possess it!

CALLED, CHOSEN AND FAITHFUL

THE FAITHFUL REMNANT

The Book of Revelation speaks of the triumph of the Lamb of God. But we are told that the Lamb has an army of disciples through whom He fights His battles and overcomes. These disciples are (1) called, (2) chosen and (3) faithful.

“He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (Rev 17:14).

Many are called, few are chosen, but fewer still are faithful. These are the overcomers spoken of ten times in the Book of Revelation. They are disciples of Jesus who have not only been accepted by God but who have been tested by Him through many circumstances and who have been approved by Him.

There were many who believed in Jesus when He was on earth, but He did not commit Himself to all of them.

“When He [Jesus] was in Jerusalem ... many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men” (John2:23,24).

Jesus knew that the vast majority of those who believed in Him still sought their own and came to Him only for personal blessings. Their sins had been forgiven but they did not desire to be overcomers. To be an overcomer one must long to be free from seeking one's own good at the expense of others.

When Gideon gathered an army to fight the enemies of Israel, he had 32,000 men with him. But God knew that they were not all wholehearted. And so God reduced their number. The fearful were sent home first. But 10,000 still remained. These were then taken down to the river and tested. Only 300 passed the test and were approved by God (Judg 7:1-8). The way those 10,000 people drank water from the river to alleviate their thirst was the means God used to determine who qualified to be in Gideon's army. Little did they realize that they were being tested.

Ninety-seven hundred (9,700) of them forgot all about the enemy while kneeling down to satisfy their thirst. Only 300 of them remained on their feet, alert, drinking the water with cupped hands.

TESTED IN DAILY LIFE

It is in the ordinary things of life that God tests us – in our attitude to money, pleasure, earthly honor and comfort, etc. Like Gideon's army, when God-arranged circumstances come to us, we do not realize that God is testing us, to see how we will respond.

Jesus warned us not to be weighed down with the cares of this world. He said, "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34).

Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians, saying, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away ...this I say ...that you may serve the Lord without distraction" (1Cor 7:29-35).

We must not allow anything of this world to distract us from total devotion to the Lord. The legitimate things of the world are a greater snare than the sinful things – because the legitimate things look so innocent and harmless!

We can alleviate our thirst – but we must cup our hands and drink what is necessary and keep alert to any surprise attack from the enemy. Our mind is

to be occupied with the battle the Lord has given us to fight, not on our own thirst, hunger or wants.

We have to forsake all and be willing to endure difficulties, if we are to be disciples of Jesus (2Tim 2:3; Luke 14:33).

Like a rubber band that is stretched, our mind can attend to the things of earth that are necessary. But one those things have been attended to, like the rubber band springing back to its normal position when released from its tension, our minds too should spring back to the things of the Lord and of eternity. This is what it means to have our mind “set... on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2).

With many believers, however, the rubber band works the other way. Their minds are stretched now and then to think about eternal things and when released, come back to their normal mode of being occupied with the things of this world!

APPROVED BY GOD

Paul exhorted Timothy, saying “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him ‘ a soldier” (2Tim 2:4). Paul was not telling Timothy there how to be saved but how he could please Christ as an effective soldier in God’s army.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,” Paul told him (2Tim 2:15). God had already accepted Timothy. He now needed to be diligent to gain God’ approval.

Christ had placed Paul in the Christian ministry because he had gained God’s approval.

He says, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord Who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me in the ministry” (1Tim 1:12).

Paul was among the called, chosen AND FAITHFUL -and he longed that Timothy should be in that number too.

But Paul had been tested before he was approved.

We, too, will be tested. Sometimes we may need to be chastened and corrected by God. Yet at all times, we can take comfort in knowing that God

will strengthen us... and that by testing, chastening and strengthening us, He will enable us to build a life of constant "triumph in Christ."