

THE POWER OF GOD IN CHRISTIANS TO OVERCOME THE DEVIL

(CP 1Pe 5:8). Peter's injunction here to *be sober, be vigilant* is God's standing order for Christians in the unrelenting war being waged against them by the devil, Satan (CP 1Cor 7:5; 2Cor 2:10-11; 11:3-4, 13-15; Eph 4:26-27; 6:11; 1Ti 3:7; 5:14-15; 2Ti 2:24-26; Jas 1:2; 1Pe 1:6; 4:12; 5:8). Those scriptures all show how unrelenting the devil is in his efforts to overcome Christians and take captive their souls. The word *devices* in 2Cor 2:11 refers to Satan's purposes and intents toward Christians. *Wiles* in Eph 6:11 means "methods" – the different plans and schemes Satan uses to deceive, entrap and enslave Christians (CP 2Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11 with 2Ti 2:24-26). 2Ti 2:24-26 does not mean that the devil can take captive the soul of any Christian he chooses. He can only overcome those not submitted to the authority of God's truth. He cannot touch those totally submitted to God. They can withstand him and he will flee from them, for God's power is greater than his (CP Jas 4:7 with 1Jn 4:4).

The nature of Christians' battle with the devil is clearly presented in 2Cor 10:3-5 (CP 10:3-5). The battle with the devil is not fought on a human level, but spiritual. Christians cannot win it in their own power. It can only be won by using the spiritual weapons God has provided Christians with (CP Eph 6:10-12). Paul's command to Christians here to *put on the whole armour of God*, does not mean that it has to be ritually "put on" every day as a routine, but that Christians are to be in a constant state of readiness, clothed with all that with which God has provided them, for offence or defence against Satan and his forces of evil, in their daily walk (CP Eph 6:13). The phrase, *having done all, to stand* in V 13, is a military term, which means "having conquered all, stand, ready to do battle again". This teaches, like Jas 4:7, that committed Christians need never fear the devil. They can resist him and he will flee from them (CP Eph 6:14-17).

The *truth* with which Christians are to gird their loins in V 14 is not merely ethical truth, but truth in all its fullness and scope – in both word and conduct. It means sincerity and integrity of character, openness, candour, truthfulness (CP 2Cor 6:14 – 7:1; Ro 13:12-14; Eph 5:8-13). The idea of Christians girding their loins with truth in the context of Eph 6:14, is of a sincere commitment to fight and win, without hypocrisy (CP Isa 11:5; Lu 12:35-36; Ro 13:12-14; 1Pe 1:13). *The breastplate of righteousness*, also in Eph 6:14, is not justifying righteousness, given to Christians upon their conversion to Christ, but sanctifying righteousness, the product of the Holy Spirit indwelling Christians. As Christians are yielded to the Holy Spirit, the righteousness of Christ produces in them the practical daily righteousness that becomes their spiritual breastplate (CP V 14 with Isa 59:17; 2Cor 6:7; 7:1; 1Th 5:8). *Hope* in the context of 1Th 5:8 is that of Christ's return, which encourages Christians to resist the spirit of the age in which they live, and keep from sinning (CP 1Th 5:6-11).

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace in Eph 6:15, means that the preparedness with which Christians are inspired by the gospel with its message of peace with God, is to be to them the protection and equipment which the boots that covered

their feet were to the Roman soldiers (CP V 15 with Isa 52:7; Ro 1:16; 10:15-17). *Above all* in Eph 6:16 means "in addition to". In addition to having their loins girded with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness, and feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, Christians are also to take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (CP V 16-17). *The shield of faith* is a present faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for victory over sin and Satan (CP Ro 8:37-39; 2Cor 2:14; 1Jn 4:4; 5:4). *The helmet of salvation* in Eph 6:17 is speaking of Christians' assurance of salvation, which Satan seeks to destroy with his weapons of doubt and discouragement – some of *the fiery darts of the wicked* in Eph 6:16. But Christians are assured of their salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ (CP Jn 3:16; 6:37-39; 10:27-29; Ro 5:8-11; 8:31-39; Php 1:6; 1Pe 1:3-5).

The sword of the Spirit in Eph 6:17 is the word of God (CP He 12:4). As the sword was the only weapon of a Roman soldier, so the word of God is the only weapon Christians need to fend off Satan's attacks (CP 2Cor 10:3-5). Christians completely submitted to the authority of God's word as Jesus was, can speak the word over any temptation of Satan and they will overcome him the same as Jesus (CP Mt 4:1-11, also Lu 4:13). Christians must strive to emulate Christ. Commit God's word to memory and speak it out like He did (CP Rev 12:11). *The word of their testimony* refers to the authority of God's word outworking in their lives. It was the key to their overcoming. God has provided His word for Christians to speak out over the devil, and He wants to see it appropriated in their lives. But it will only work for them to the extent that it is stored up in their hearts, the conditions for it to work are met, and it is acted out in faith (CP Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-3; Pr 4:20-23 with Mk 11:22-26). Faith to believe that God will perform His word, comes to Christians by continuously hearing, reading and meditating on His word, and storing it up in their hearts (CP Ro 10:17 with Mt 12:34-35). What Christians speak out over their circumstances in life is what they will get. Whether the words they speak will be faith-filled or faith-less will be determined by how much of God's word is stored up in their hearts (ref this author's study 'Confessing God's Word', Lesson 9, **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith**).

Satan will try to destroy the faith of Christians suffering persecution and undergoing trials. But Christians can withstand him, who remain steadfast in the faith (CP Jas 1:2-4). *Divers temptations* in V 2 (KJV), are trials – testing situations in life, which include persecutions, afflictions and hardships that Christians have to undergo (CP 1Pe 4:12-19). According to V 17 here the trials Christians undergo in life are Divinely ordained judgements. Many Christians believe that they are from God, to test their faith. But that is not correct – they are from Satan to destroy their faith, if it were possible (CP Jas 1:13-17 with 2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:10-18; 1Pe 5:8-9). God does not send trials to Christians, but He permits them for the ultimate good of Christians in His eternal purposes (CP Mal 3:1-4; Mk 10:29-30; Jn 15:2; Ro 8:18; 1Cor 10:13; 2Cor 12:10; He 12:3-8; Jas 1:1-4; 1Pe 1:6-9; 2:11-12, 19-20; 3:13-17; 4:19). God's purpose behind the trials Christians undergo, is to refine their faith. Christians who are absolutely unswerving in their faith

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and have totally committed themselves to God's care can unreservedly depend upon His care and protection (CP Psa 91:1-16; Mt 5:10-12; Lu 6:22-23; Ro 8:16-18; 2Cor 4:8-11, 17-18; Php 1:27-30; Jas 1:2-4, 12; 1Pe 1:6-9; 4:12-16).

Christians must be prepared to suffer for Christ. They are warned in scripture that they will undergo persecutions, afflictions and hardships as a norm of Christianity (CP Mt 10:38; Mk 10:29-30; Jn 15:18-21; Ac 14:22; Ro 8:17; Php 1:29; 1Th 3:1-5; 2Ti 2:11-12; 3:10-12; He 2:18; 1Pe 2:19-23; 3:14-17; 1Jn 3:13). How Christians are to *count it all joy* while suffering for their faith, as James exhorted them to do in Jas 1:2, means that they have to look beyond their prevailing circumstances to the future reward that awaits them in heaven (CP Jas 1:2, 12 and 2:5 with Mt 5:10-12; 2Cor 4:17-18; Jas 1:12; 1Pe 1:6-7; 4:12-19; Rev 2:10-11; 3:10). The goal God has for every one of His children is to share in His eternal glory in Christ. It is to this end that He will equip, establish, strengthen and set Christians, who do not succumb to the devil, in firm foundations. Trials have to be endured by Christians to teach them patience and to lead them to maturity. Christians' faith can only reach full maturity when it has been tried and proved (CP Ro 5:3-5; Jas 5:10-11; 1Pe 5:8-10). In Pe 5:8-10 Peter warns Christians against succumbing to the devil in the midst of their trials, and giving up on God. He encourages them to stand firm in the faith and resist the devil because Christians suffering persecutions and trials do not stand alone. Everywhere in the world there are Christians suffering for their faith. Any suffering seems as though it will never end, but when contrasted with eternal life with Christ, it is only temporary.

The weapons of Christians' warfare against the devil are both defensive and offensive. As well as being able to withstand the devil's attacks, committed Christians can take the offensive to him and he cannot prevail against them (CP Mt 16:18-19 with Mt 10:7-8; Mk 6:7; Lu 10:19; Mk 16:17-18 and 2Cor 10:3-5).

Strongholds in 2Cor 10:4 is used metaphorically of anything in which one trusts that opposes God's will (CP Pr 21:22). *Imaginations* in 2Cor 10:5 are thoughts or reasonings hostile to the Christian faith (CP Ro 14:1). *High thing* is a haughty mental elevation that lifts itself above the experiential knowledge Christians have of God – an ideological fort that is a barricade against the truth of God's word (CP Job 24:24). Sadly, it is not only the ungodly who hold onto strongholds, imaginations and high things though, it is Christians also. Many try to rationalise scriptures and so render themselves unable to partake of God's blessings. *Bringing into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ*, emphasises the need for Christians to ensure that their thoughts are always aligned with Christ and His teachings (CP Jer 17:5-6 with Jer 17:7-8 and Psa 1:1-3). We see here the contrast between Christians who experience barrenness with those who receive blessings. The blessed ones are those who rely implicitly on God's word to be fulfilled in their lives. There are no thoughts, ideas, reasonings or philosophies that can usurp God's authority where they are concerned. There is also no sin in their lives (CP Ro 6:16-18; 8-13).

In closing this study, it needs to be noted here that Christians' warfare also involves warring against their own sinful nature as well as Satan (CP Psa 39:1; 1Cor 10:12-13; 2Cor 13:5). Christians must be aware that the mind is a battleground and that many evil thoughts and deeds originate with them (CP Ga 5:19-21, 1Th 4:3 with Jas 1:13-17). Most temptations come from the devil but Christians must never blame him for any sins they commit. No force at all can lead Christians astray who are resolute in their intent to adhere strictly to the authority of God's word (CP Job 31:1-40 with 1 Jn 5:18). God has adequately provided Christians with grace to overcome temptations and resist sinning. He has given them all things that pertain to life and Godliness (Cp 2Pe 1:2-4).