

Newsletter August 2013

This brief newsletter on spiritual warfare contains edited excerpts from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book I, Chapter 7.5. Being a Christian is not constituted in part-time participation in certain religious activities or in church ceremonies and rituals through our physical presence at various meetings. Nor is it a mystical intellectual exercise or some kind of psychological crutch to relieve us from worry and strife. In fact, a Christian's life is always attended with many troubles and difficulties in this fallen world in which we live (cf. Jn.16:33). Christian living requires complete submission to and full-time involvement with God's will and purpose in every detail of our being as we accept Christ not only as our savior, but also as our Lord — fully relinquishing control of every aspect of our lives to Him. This is a radical concept to the mind of fallen man who demands complete control over his own destiny — an impossible notion stemming from Adam's original sin.

Immediately after the fall of man (cf. Newsletter October 2012), God placed enmity — a state of hostility or war — between mankind and Satan along with his demonic minions (cf. Ge.3:15). Due to man's fallen nature, in which he readily gives in to Satan's evil designs by yielding to the law of sin that persists in his flesh (cf. Ro.7:23), this hostility is not commonly experienced by the unregenerated. Satan has no need to attack one that he already possesses as his pawn. When we are born anew in the spirit, however, our old sin nature is declared to be dead by God — crucified in Christ's body on the cross. The chains with which Satan held us bound to sin are broken and we are released from its restraints. This emancipation of our soul enables us to walk in a newly regenerated spirit — no longer relying solely on the five senses of the flesh to guide our lives. Unfortunately, memories of our old nature still remain in our fleshly minds such that we tend to drag the corpse of our old sin nature around with us in our new walk (cf. Ro.7:15-23). We soon discover, as we begin our walk in the spirit, that the new nature has very little power of its own that we can exercise with our mind inasmuch as it continues to be pummeled through our physical senses from the fallen world about us.

Therefore, we find that receiving Christ as savior and fully accepting Him as our Lord initially wreaks havoc on our attitudes and thoughts — setting off a state of internal warfare in our soul on a massive scale. This war is far different from any fought externally with men's physical bodies using material weapons. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war [according to] the flesh" (2Co.10:3). This war is altogether spiritual with regard to the enemy, the battlefield, and the weapons used. We do not do battle directly against others in the physical world, but rather we battle against the invisible powers that overcome and motivate them. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ep.6:12).

As newborn creatures in Christ, we must quickly adjust to a new way of life that is in complete opposition to that being lived by fallen men and women in the world at large — a way in which we also previously walked and even took delight in before we were converted. After the euphoria and excitement of our initial conversion and forgiveness of sin becomes the effort of daily commitment, a new believer quite often finds himself bewildered and in the middle of a war within his mind and soul that he did not anticipate. Only expecting and seeking peace and comfort in his newfound faith, he is unprepared for the great internal struggle that ensues. Moreover, he has suddenly become salt in the wounds of the spiritually dead such that he is opposed and belittled by his worldly-minded friends and even by close relatives who are not among the redeemed (cf. Mt.10:35,36). The newborn finds that he must now walk as a stranger and sojourner in an alien world that was once his own. This is why a new believer must soon seek out and become involved with others of like faith for their mutual support, consolation, and accountability.

The ultimate solution to this great internal conflict between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit is to be found in the regeneration of the minds of those that have come to believe in Jesus Christ (Ro.12:2). Spiritual regeneration of the minds of the elect does not come about immediately, and it is not the result of any of our own efforts; it is a gift of God's grace fully working in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Ph.1:6). Our spiritual walk and struggle in this life is a learning process conducted by the Holy Spirit even as the remains of our old sin nature attempt to trip us up at every turn. Over time, we can come to recognize some of the more egregious pitfalls in the Christian life such that we can avoid them. We must learn to recognize all sinful thoughts as they first spring into our minds and exterminate them immediately before they can come to fruition and overcome us in thought processes that result in sinful action. Although sin is no longer a way of life with the

Christian who walks in the guidance of the spirit, even the most devout believer stumbles into sin on occasion due to the fleshly weakness that remains from his old sin nature. When we trip and fall into sin, we must at once confess our sins to God, putting them under the blood of Christ, and then solemnly resolve to avoid ever repeating them (cf. 1Jn.1:8-10). We must not allow our minds to dwell on the past sin that so easily entrapped us lest we again be snared by its attraction, but rather put the sin aside as dead and buried by keeping our minds focused upon the cross whereupon all our sins past, present, and future were long ago crucified within our old sin nature in Christ's body on the cross of Calvary.

Although Satan has a vast array of weapons to use against us, the believer is far from defenseless. The Apostle Paul in saying that we are to "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ep.6:11), goes on to list an array of spiritual weaponry that is available for every Christian's use in the spiritual battles in which we must all participate. We must understand as we go forward in this discussion that our goal is not to conquer Satan in battle; we would be no match for him in our own strength. Moreover, although we must oppose his evil intent at every turn, we have no need to conquer him since Satan is already a defeated foe in the aftermath of Jesus' atoning death for us and his resurrection from the dead. We are therefore under attack by one whose demise is already ensured. The Christian's sole purpose in the ensuing battle is to consistently stand firm against Satan's devious methods that are repeatedly launched against us as one of God's elect.

First and foremost, the Holy Spirit conditions our minds to diligently search out the things of God, and to perceive His Truth, which much as a strong belt holds our array of spiritual weapons together (Ep.6:14a). Man's salvation is based solely upon the objective fact that Christ came out of deity in the flesh as a man, that He died for our sins on the cross, and that He was raised again for our justification (1Co.15:3-4). Christ is now ruling within us from his throne on high through the indwelling Holy Spirit. That alone is man's source of salvation, which is both secure and eternal apart from any earthly powers (cf. Ro. 8:38,39). There is no other way to achieve and maintain knowledge of this great Truth than by diligently studying the Holy Bible, which is the Word of the living God who cannot lie. We must constantly meditate upon His Word such that it becomes part and parcel of our mindset. Only when our old sin nature is finally reckoned in our own minds as being truly and finally dead in Christ's death, and therefore no longer able to rule over us, can we focus our thoughts upon the internal battle in our new spiritual nature.

Girded about and held firmly in place by the belt of Truth is an array of additional spiritual weaponry. First, we must put on the breastplate of righteousness, which is the righteousness of Christ (Ep.6:14b). We must wear His righteousness because we have none of our own. Only His righteousness can deflect the fiery darts of the evil one preventing them from penetrating into our hearts. We know that any attempt to wear a breastplate of our own righteousness created from our own strength in the flesh is to no avail since such human works can only deal with sin in outward appearance, not inwardly where it continues to fester and grow. Nevertheless, the old sin nature in the flesh persists in that false notion often leading us to practice various forms of worthless legalism. The conscience that has been enlivened by the Holy Spirit to aid us in our spiritual walk is often attacked and misled by Satan to accuse us of our failure to do increasingly more useless works. Unable to rationally convince ourselves of an ability to live up to the whole Law of God by our own efforts, an attempt to salve the conscience is sometimes sought through establishing various extra-biblical petty laws in order to create a false aura of pseudo-righteousness in the flesh (cf. *Legal Holiness*, Book II, page 323). In doing this, we may find somewhat of which to glory among others, but certainly not parade our vainglory before God (cf. Ro.4:2). Pride comes before a fall into sin such that we must constantly be on guard against placing too much trust in the assurance of our own sense of spirituality. Rather, we must systematically and repeatedly examine ourselves to make certain that we are well centered in the true faith through the diligent study of Scripture under the ever-present guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we must walk in the shoes of the "gospel of peace" wherever we may go in the world (Ep.6:15). The Gospel provides us with a firm unshakable foundation whenever we must take a stand against the wiles of Satan. Everywhere we walk we must be prepared to dispense the Gospel of peace with God, established through the cross, to others. The Gospel also protects us from being contaminated with the things of the world as we walk through this life. Everywhere we tread the shoes of the Gospel insulate us from the fallen earth on

which we must walk, even as we leave the “footprints” of the Gospel behind for others to see and follow. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth” (Is.52:7)!

Thirdly, we must project our faith before us such that it acts as a forward shield against all of the evil inclinations and accusations that Satan may hurl against us (Ep.6:16). The Roman soldier of Paul’s day carried a huge shield that covered his entire body. During an immense barrage of flaming arrows by the enemy, he could completely hide behind it. Faith is our great refuge in the spiritual battle when the way gets extremely intense. Unlike the breastplate of Christ’s righteousness that is worn close to our hearts, the shield of faith is held out at arms length and can be moved to and fro as required to defend all parts of the soul during the intense battle. Certainly, we must persevere in our faith if we are to stand against Satan and his minions (Ep.6:13,14).

Fourthly, our mind must be kept securely encased within a helmet of salvation, which is the true and unshakable assurance of our personal redemption in Christ (Ep.6:17a). Satan has many means at his disposal to attack the soul of one who has received salvation in order to divert them from the new spiritual life that is theirs. At first, he attempts to fill their minds with doubts about the reality of their salvation. Without full assurance of our salvation, we may come to doubt whether we are even enlisted on the right side of the war. Defection or compromise is not an option in this war in which our very soul is at stake. Elsewhere, Paul refers to this helmet as the full “hope of salvation” (1Th. 5:8). Hope and assurance go hand in hand to protect our minds and give us a strong sense of inward peace even in the midst of the fiercest spiritual battles.

Fifthly, we find that we need not go into battle without an offensive weapon; the Word of God is a spiritual sword to be used against the enemy in our own defense (Ep.6:17b). “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (He.4:12). Even as we use that sword against the enemy the second sharp edge facing us reminds us to use it faithfully lest we ourselves become cut by the Truth of God’s Word on the backstroke. We must study to know God’s Word well, and then depend upon the Holy Spirit to fill us with the proper words to say when we are attacked, tried, or tempted lest we struggle in vain (cf. Mt.10:19).

Lastly but very importantly, the Christian must make use of the means of spiritual communication available to him at all times, which is prayer (Ep.6:18). It does no good for us to be out in the front lines in full battle array, if we have no specific sense of purpose or direction. Prayer keeps us individually directed in the great war as God commands omnisciently from his throne above. Through prayer we can also avoid taking dangerous paths wherein we may be tempted, and when the enemy compasses us about we can call upon the Lord for his divine aid (cf. Mt.6:13a). Satan frequently places obstacles in our path to hinder our Christian walk. Unfortunately when those obstacles are encountered, many may assume that it is because they are out of the will of God — not realizing that the evil one places them there precisely because we are acting in the will of God, which Satan consistently opposes. Through persistent prayer, we can come to understand these obstacles when doubts arise about the proper direction of our Christian walk enabling us to properly stand our ground without deviating from the true path that God has set before us.

Finally, it is essential for us to understand that although we battle against the old fleshly nature, which was corrupted in the fall, the physical flesh of our bodies is not inherently evil that we should despise it, abuse it, or fail to properly nurture it. Because of the fall of Adam’s spirit, which separated him from God’s benevolent care and guidance, man’s flesh now rules over him by way of the five physical senses through which the world rushes in. Satan through various evil world customs and fallen systems manipulates fallen man’s every thought inducing him to sin. As Christians, we must again put our bodies under the subjection of our regenerated spirit such that the flesh can no longer control us, but rather we can again faithfully use our bodies as obedient servants for good works in the time that we occupy them here on earth. Although we are constantly at war with the powers of darkness in this epic struggle, we are never alone (cf. Jn.14:18), nor is the final outcome ever in doubt. We need not fear the power of Satan or the wiles of the world he presently rules, for Jesus, whom we serve, has already overcome the world (Jn.16:33) as He died to set us free from Satan’s evil grasp. We are an occupying force in this present age to hold the spiritual high ground of Christ’s victory over the world until the Victor returns in all his majestic glory. © Arthur J. Smith August 2013