

## THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

I Peter 5:8-9

When we are saved and start the Christian pilgrimage, we never dream that the road to glory will be filled with so many obstacles, or that we shall be called upon to pass through so many difficult places. After we are born from above our citizenship is in heaven. But before we reach heaven, and the Lord Jesus receives us into eternal glory, there will be many trials through which we must pass, many challenges to our faith and our application of it.

This is the reason that the apostle Peter called upon all the readers of his epistle to be sober and watchful. Sobriety means thoughtfulness; facing things as they are. And watchfulness means alertness. Both suggest that we are going to be perplexed and taken unawares -- that sneak attacks will be made upon us either through our minds, our emotions, our circumstances, or perhaps through others.

When you receive Christ as your Saviour and begin to walk in fellowship with Him, God's enemy becomes your enemy. But we should match the problems of life with the promises of God and there find victory. Although we have an adversary, we read this encouraging word: "We have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1).

So, the issue is drawn clearly. The adversary attacks us from every vantage point possible in order that he may disturb, harass, or devour us. Then, our Advocate pleads for us, releasing in our behalf all of the merit of His wonderful work on the cross.

Our adversary is real, cunning, and crafty. But through faith in our Advocate we can resist and overcome our adversary. Meanwhile, we look for our final deliverance when our Advocate will banish our adversary from the universe.

### I. The Strategies of Satan.

If Christians do not feed on the Word of God, it is not long before their adversary, Satan, will suggest to them doubts about the goodness of God, and about the judgments of God. He will suggest doubts about the ways in which God leads and deals with us. Unless we are undergirded by the Word of God, such doubts will begin to master us.

Doubts rob us of our peace of mind, of our assurance, of our certainty. With these gone, we are unconvincing in life and testimony. Satan thereby destroys our effectiveness as witnesses for Christ.

The adversary sometimes comes at us through disease, working upon the mind and upon the emotions. There is a wearing effect when pain is suffered for a long time. One sick man said: "It takes more of the grace of God to bear infirmity and old age and disease than it would take to heal me completely. I have to cry out to God day after day for grace to sustain me in my infirmities."

Often Satan just harasses. He asks, "Is God good to let you get old like this? Is God good to let your vision dim? Is God good to let your arteries harden? Is God good not to let you have a full night's sleep?"

Satan is also a past master at defilement. He knows that we have certain basic urges, appetites, and instincts. He puts all kinds of bait on the hook to keep our bodies yearning for gratification of one kind or another. Satan knows if he can get in a little defilement here and a little there -- in thoughts, or imagination, or desires, he weakens our conscious fellowship with the Lord. He tries his best to get God's children into compromising situations.

These are but a few of the many crafty methods with which Satan seeks to oppress the people of God and to keep them from growing in grace.

How can God's children overcome such an adversary? By trusting Christ. We need to remain steadfast in the faith that Christ died for our sins, that He was raised for our justification, and that He lives at the right hand of God, pleading on our behalf. We can rely on His Word that He has sent His Spirit in our hearts to take up the case of Christ within us, and that, through faith in the ever-present Son of God, we can meet the adversary at every level. We don't have to be overcome by him, but we can learn to overcome Satan.

Our hope is in Christ. He is sympathetic. He is kindly disposed toward us. He is here to help us, and He is able to do so. He will never forsake us. If we will simply trust Him, sit at His feet and learn from Him, we can be led successfully all the way.

When we are experiencing difficulties or enduring afflictions, we tend to assume that we are having it a little rougher than anyone else has ever had it. We need to realize, however, that all of God's children go through such times of testing and trial as long as they are in the world.

When you have a surgical operation you learn of another that underwent the same kind. You find that he knew what pain and suffering were, too. And he, too, found God's grace sufficient. So, there are at least two of you who know that God can keep His children through that kind of a trial. Soon you hear of someone else facing a similar trial and you can go to him and say, "Cheer up! I have been through this and God sustained me and brought me through. He can sustain you, too."

## II. The Grace of God.

In Romans five we are taught that the law came in to expose the sinfulness of sin. And Paul concluded with the statement, "But as sin abounded, grace doth much more abound." Whatever Satan can stir up in our old nature or environment is more than matched by enough of God's grace to meet it head on. Whether the attack is on the level of the intellect, the emotions, the will, or the environment, there is sufficient grace for every situation and every trial. The God of all grace knows how to administer grace.

Frequently we become confused and weary and we get bruised and battered. We sometimes fall and get hurt. But we have an Advocate Who will train us, discipline us, correct us, help us, and Who will not let us go. He is leading us in triumph over this adversary, over temptation, over sin, and eventually over death.

What you suffer becomes an integral part of your discipline and the development of your faith. What you suffer is an occasion either to doubt God or to trust Him more. If, in the suffering, you refuse to doubt God and choose to trust Him, you will be lifted to a new plateau of glory. After you have risen to this new level, your temptation will be to say, "Now, I have arrived. It is all over." But before you know it, there will be new trouble. God doesn't want you to stop there. You are not in heaven yet. There is much more ahead in this life, and God doesn't want you to remain content where you are. You will discover again the limitations of your own nature and the unlimited grace of God. You resolve not to doubt, but to trust. So you have reached still another plateau.

You may ask, "Must I go all through life in this way?" Yes! That is the way you go through, and if God didn't let those troubles come, you wouldn't grow. You would stop right where you are. God has to keep stirring you so that you will pursue holiness and go on in the things of God. Trouble spurs us to know more of Him, His grace, His Word, and His will. When God has finished with you here, He will then take you home to heaven. But as long as He leaves you here you will experience ceaseless cycles of trouble in which you can either believe or doubt. If you doubt, you will fall, but if you believe

you will go up to a new plateau.

Second Corinthians 3:18 says: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass (that is, in the Word of God) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image; from glory to glory." The God of grace has called us to His eternal glory. The beginning of the Christian life is glorious; afterward the pilgrimage is just one step after another. Here it is glory, then trouble, then challenge, then conflict, until you think that you are going down in defeat, but instead you trust Christ. Because you trust Him He lifts you up higher.

Satan can trouble us in many ways while we make our pilgrimage through this unfriendly world. He can take away our goods or destroy our homes. He can afflict our bodies. He can bathe every assignment in trouble.

A man moves upward as he lives by faith in Jesus Christ. He is bruised, battered, misunderstood, and often misrepresented, but he can keep moving steadfast in the faith. We can trust Him. At times we can't see Him, but we know He is there, and we can say with Job: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Sometime the moment will come when He shall say; "It is enough! Come home!" God has things for us to do that He cannot talk to us about now. We are not ready. God has a wonderful future prepared for us, but He has numerous things to do through us before He takes us home to that glorious future. The question is, Will we put our hands in His and walk with Him, or will we take our hands out of His and go our own individual ways? As long as our hand remains in His hand, we shall find as did Paul that we "can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us."