

"No place in me"

The Bible provides us with some very encouraging words *"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"*. We therefore learn that our Lord Jesus suffered the same difficulties, problems, issues, crises, trials and temptations which we as His people endure, and yet He never committed sin or moved away from the will of His Father. In many ways the real root of sin is unbelief; failing to trust in God and the word of God in our lives, suffering as the result of the unbelief as our doubting prevents God's power working in our lives to keep us in His will. There is encouragement, however, in that we are told that our Lord Jesus knows the feeling of our weaknesses, never entered into unbelief Himself, and can help us in times of need.

As we have said, our Lord Jesus went through many trials in His life, in particular the 40 days He spent in the wilderness being tempted of the devil, the agonies He suffered in the garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion, and the separation from His Father while upon the cross. At no time did He ever fail to trust and honour His Father, and therefore provides a great example of how to live as Christians and so remain constant in our life of service of our Lord Jesus. We need to look at Jesus' example and learn from Him to ensure that as Christians we remain 'Right with God'. Sadly many Christians suffer failure, in varying degrees, in their lives. Some suffer from depression, fear and anxiety, some have mental health problems, others experience breakdown in their marriages and in their families, some from sickness, and others just fall away and go back into sin and sinning; all of which, it is suggested, should not be the testimony or experience of true Christians. We are to have the testimony of Jesus Christ in our lives. *"Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world"*. The Lord Jesus in the 'Sermon on the mount' exhorts those who were listening to Him to *"So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven"*. It is our lives, much more than our words, by which we must demonstrate the difference having Jesus Christ in our lives really makes, as we witness and reach out to those who are not yet God's people. If Christians are just the same as their non-Christian neighbours and friends how will they persuade their friends or neighbours to come to Jesus Christ? There are so many ways in which the Christians and Christianity have departed from the 'Word of God' and the testimony of the Lord Jesus, and allowed compromise, error and in many ways just plain sin into their lives both individually and as churches. All sorts of reasons and excuses have been made to allow sin in lives and to continue in that sin. Paul says this *"But fornication, and **all** uncleanness, or covetousness, let it **not** be **once named** among you, as becomes saints"*. However such things are rife within Christian churches and Christian lives and many of these things have become the accepted normal for behaviour. Whatever the world may approve, and even churches accept, the 'word of God' remains the same and it is essential that we fall into line with God's word.

We must discover the means by which we can overcome in all our temptations and be kept from sin and moving out of God's will. We are all brought up in differing cultures and traditions where many of these wrong things are the normal. Many of us will have been brought up by parents who have directed us in ways, and developed patterns of thinking and behaviour in us, which are not helpful and have caused damage to our souls. Education and training can do the same thing, and what is taken as normal in the world is not normal as far as God is concerned. We need our Lord Jesus to lead us in *"Paths of righteousness for His Name's sake"*. This teaching is designed to look at the reasons for our errors and failures, both as individuals and as churches, and then to provide answers,

with the intention of finding a way forward for Christians to live a 'Holy and righteous life', looking for the coming again of our Lord Jesus. The real problem is sin; we need to look at how the Lord Jesus has dealt with sin and to be clear in our understanding, both in our hearts and minds, of the truth. We can then believe God to work out His freedom in our lives. We will start and see how Jesus lived free from sin and overcame in all His temptations.

The Lord Jesus, talking to his disciples just before His crucifixion, makes this amazing statement in John 14. *"The prince of this world comes and has nothing in me"*. There was "not one thing", that is what the Greek word "ouden" used here means, that satan had in our Lord Jesus. He had no place in Jesus and there was no occasion for stumbling in our Lord. The NIV translates the verse *"Has no hold over me"*. Jesus mentions in Luke 22 *"When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness"*. So it is clear that there was a time when the power of darkness operated and it was the time of the death of our Lord Jesus, with all that was involved in that time in His life with the trial, the beatings, the betrayal, and the physical, mental and spiritual pain of the cross. It was also the time of victory, for if darkness had not had its day and unleashed all its power, Jesus would not have had the opportunity to conquer all the powers of darkness in His death. So satan came looking for the Lord Jesus at that time of His cross and Jesus says *"he is coming but has nothing in me"*. Ephesians tells us that *"The prince of the power of the air is the spirit which now works in the children of disobedience"*. Jesus, of course, was not a child of disobedience and always obeyed His Father, having the testimony, *"I do **always** the things which please my Father"*. Indeed we are told *"He learned obedience through the things which He suffered"*, and surely that is why the enemy had 'nothing' in Him (or no hold over Him), as satan can only work in those who disobey God.

We see therefore that the secret to enduring in times of temptation and trial is for satan to have 'nothing' in us, no hold over us; that is achieved simply by being obedient to God and having the testimony *"Not my will but Your will be done"*. It is worth noting that Jesus had made Himself of no reputation, the Greek word meaning that *"He emptied Himself"*. We read in Colossians that *"It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell"* and *"in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*. So perhaps it was the emptying of Himself which allowed the Father to fill Jesus with all fulness, and why as a consequence there was no room for satan. Jesus of course had to maintain that fulness, and maybe one of the secrets for Christians is that, having received and been filled with the Holy Spirit, we maintain that fulness. In the Acts we regularly read *"And Peter, filled with the Spirit"*; so for the early Christians being filled with the Spirit of God was the normal experience of their lives.

There is an interesting word in the New Testament which is 'occasion' and it means 'the base for the operations of warfare'. Although not used in John 14, where Jesus mentions *"Nothing in me"*, it conveys the right idea, in that there was 'nothing' in the Lord Jesus which the enemy could use as a base in order to attack Him and try to destroy Him. This is in contrast to Paul writing of his own condition in Romans 7 where he says *"For sin, taking **occasion** by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me"*. Sin had 'something' in Paul and it proved to be to his downfall, his destruction and spiritual death. *"The wages of sin is death"*. Our opening quotation tells us that Jesus did not sin, in all his trials; there was 'nothing' in Him, no occasion in Him to provide a base for satan to operate against Him and produce sin.

Sin is a word which people really don't like to mention in modern times; there is usually some excuse, or medical diagnosis, for bad behaviour. Sin is the overall word for 'immoral behaviour and the controlling power which dominates human lives and causes them to act against the will of a Holy God'. It involves not only immoral sin, but pride, ambition, indeed all the lusts of the flesh, which

Paul identifies in the book of Galatians chapter 5. So our Lord Jesus was able to endure trials without sin, as there was no sin in Him. The apostle John says this of our Lord Jesus *"And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is **no sin**".* 2 Corinthians 5.21 tells us *"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew **no sin**; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him",* and 1 Peter, *"who did **no sin**, neither was guile found in His mouth"* So the Bible is quite clear that the difference between our Lord Jesus and all other humans is the lack of sin in His nature. He was born of God, born without the principle of sin inherited from Adam. Paul the apostle found himself in a different spiritual state *"Oh! Wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* Sin had so much of a place in Paul; it worked spiritual death in him. However, after his plea for deliverance, he goes on to say *"Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ"*. There was a solution, an answer to this wretchedness, and in Romans 8 Paul says *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **has made me free** from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was **weak** through the flesh, God sending his **own Son** in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, **condemned sin in the flesh (or put to death by passing the judgement of death upon sin)**: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled **in us**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"*. Paul found a new spiritual principle, a new spiritual law, operating within him called *"The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus"*. It had **made** him free from the law of sin and death which had previously worked in him. We find that Paul was **made** free, spiritually he had been **recreated**, or remade, **free** from the old spiritual law of sin and death, and that which had 'something', or a place in him, **no longer** had control of him, or a 'place' in his heart. Therefore there was no occasion, no launching pad, nor place of operations, inside him and his heart to cause him any more damage; rather if Paul continued to walk in the spirit, the righteousness of the law would be fulfilled in him. This confirms and joins together the need to know this new spiritual law at work in our lives and, as we have seen, to continue to be filled with the Spirit of God. Romans chapter 6 tells us *"Being made free from sin we became the servants of righteousness"*. So we find that if we are to live lives free from wrong doing, errors and so on, the first thing which must be dealt with is the nature of sin, and its removal from within our hearts.

Many Christians believe, sadly, that this is just not possible, but how are Christians to live lives pleasing to God if the principle and nature of sin is not removed from their hearts, and has a part and place in everything that we do? John, in his first letter, says this, *"Because as He **is**, so are we in this world"* and *"He that says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked"*. How is it possible to be in this world as Jesus **is now** and still have the nature of sin within our hearts? Jesus has risen, Jesus is glorified, Jesus has overcome; that is as **He is now** and we **are in Him**. Unless and until this is properly understood and believed by every true Christian, the prince of this world when he comes will always find 'something' in the Christian's heart. There will always be a place of attack against the human soul. This place was first established in Adam when he sinned and has been in every human being since; that is, until our Lord Jesus came. Only the power of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ working to remove the power of sin within us, and create in us a new heart, a new nature, can bring us into the place where the prince of this world has 'nothing' in us. We have already quoted *"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that **we** might be **made the righteousness of God in Him**"*. Only when the power of His cross has worked in us can we be as Jesus **is** and walk as He walked; we have to go to where His is spiritually, and that means going through His death into newness of life.

This of course does **not** mean that we **cannot sin**, that would be a dreadful error to believe. (It is also a dreadful error to believe that we have never sinned. To do so makes God a liar, and if and when we believe such a lie, we show that there is NO TRUTH in us. We all need to confess our sins as the first requirement for experiencing forgiveness and receiving the Lord Jesus). The Bible never suggests

that we cannot sin as Christians, even Jesus Himself could have sinned, otherwise all the trials and temptations He went through would have been pointless, and there would be no way in which He could be touched with the feelings of our infirmities/weaknesses. The Glory of the life of our Lord Jesus is that He did no sin, and there was 'nothing' the enemy could find in Him to make him sin. This is His testimony, *"In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"*. To come to this place of faith in the work of our Lord on the cross, we need to look not at ourselves, but rather to our Lord Jesus. He has finished His work of redemption, all authority is given to Him, and looking to Him we see in Him all our needs met, and all our sins forgiven.

The problem for many Christians is that we don't know ourselves as we are in Christ. It seems that in the early church the elders and apostles, and no doubt the majority of the Christians, were spiritually aware. In these times, it seems that our 'Spiritual senses' are rather dulled, and yet in times of revival Christians come alive again and discover and know what they are in Christ. We need to learn to understand ourselves and to know ourselves after the spirit and no longer after the flesh. Paul identified that in him, that is to say in his flesh, dwelt nothing that was good. However he found, as a Christian, in his spirit, when he knew **himself** after his spirit, because Christ **was in him**, his spirit was **life** because of righteousness. This great transformation in spirit/heart enabled him no longer to need to live after the flesh and fulfil the lusts of the flesh, which meant death, but rather to walk in the Spirit and so to please his Lord. Paul beseeches the Corinthians to *"Be reconciled to God"*.

Reconciliation' means to thoroughly change, where everything that did not agree with God in life and nature is removed, and replaced with everything that agrees with God both in life and nature. He wanted the Christians to know themselves in Christ and so experience being new creations in every part of their lives. If Christians are continually told that there is no possibility of living a holy life, or even worse, that those who are their leaders demonstrate by example that there is no such possibility, what hope is there for the Christian to reach out and believe God to do such a wonderful work in them, so that they find themselves a new creation in Christ Jesus? So, if we are to find in our seeking a place where the prince of this world and sin has 'nothing' in us, we must first overcome the errors in teaching and the compromise ministered by many preachers and teachers. Unless sin is removed, everything we seek to do to move away from the problems and needs of our lives will be undermined. All attempts to live differently and not to be dominated by our previous culture and upbringing will fail. The sin in our hearts will always drag us back, as it provides a place from which the enemy can work against us from within. Some who lead churches are still full of ambition and selfishness; sometimes it is why they got into leadership in the first place. They have never been prepared to let Jesus do in them His work which removes their sin with its selfishness and ambition. As a result, by both word and example, some leaders fail to declare freedom and righteousness for those who listen to them. Jesus rebuked the Scribes and the Pharisees saying *"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in"*. Sadly Christians have suffered in the same way through poor teaching, which prevents them entering into the wonderful freedom God has provided for them in His Son.

Please understand, being made free from sin in our hearts does **not** make us perfect, rather it makes us aware that there is a great deal of spiritual growth and understanding to achieve. However, it does get the foundations of our lives right. It does make us aware that there is no longer a principle within our hearts that spoils everything and makes it inevitable that we will do things against the will of God. It sets us on a path in which we will normally believe the Lord and look to Him to meet our

needs. We will cry "Abba Father" and, although we may not have faith for all things, we will have faith that 'God is, and is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him'. Paul wrote that he had not yet attained and he *"Pressed on to the prize of the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus"*; that should be the attitude of all Christians, those free from sin and alive unto God. They will realise that God has a great deal more to work in them, in order to perfect His love in them, ready for the coming again of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. So much could be written and said about this area of truth, but we must move on and listen to the words of our Lord Jesus *"If anyone will follow after me, let him deny himself and take up His cross"*. We have to deny our own thoughts, ideas and prejudices, even our own natural limitations, and take up His cross to discover the freedom following Jesus brings.

Next in our considerations though, it is important to look at how temptation works in us. We need to recognise its source and origin and then learn how to deal with that temptation. James writes these very direct words *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren"*. So don't err, in other words don't get it wrong, please understand how temptation works. Let's go through each phrase and see the order and look for freedom in the explanation. Firstly don't try and blame God. The world does that and, at least in the UK, blasphemy is on almost everybody's lips, as people blame God for what goes wrong in almost everything, and express their complaint with their mouths. It is a thing of culture now, as almost everybody does it, and is just part of life to most people, showing us how far our society has fallen in its rebellion against God. So don't blame God. When you are tempted, you are drawn away by your **own lust**. Galatians tells us that the flesh lusts against the spirit; so it is our own natural desires, they are in our flesh, which draws us away, one assumes from righteousness or right doing. Jesus Himself was tempted and we are told he was hungry after 40 days of fasting. The natural temptation would have been to draw Him away by a natural desire for food, to act independently of His Father and work a miracle in His own power. With the second temptation, Jesus would have seen all the kingdoms of the world in that moment when satan showed them to Him, and would have felt the strong desire, which is what 'lust' means, to have the kingdoms and the people for Himself. Jesus would have been drawn away and enticed. The prospect must have looked really attractive to Him; however He would not pay the price the devil was asking. The thought of a beautiful loaf of bread must have seemed wonderful to Him, but not at the price satan was asking. The word 'entice' means "to lure by a bait". That is just what fishermen do, they try to make the bait look attractive; the fish will go for it, and be caught. The bait of any temptation has to look attractive, if we are to be hooked. So we are drawn away when we are enticed, the prospect of doing what we are tempted to do must look attractive. For the thief, the item to be stolen must have some sort of value; for the adulterer, the woman must look attractive, as will the act of adultery and the strong urge in the flesh.

Temptation involves the 'enticement', the setting of the bait or trap, and at that stage it is not sin; only when it is conceived does it bring forth sin. The word for 'conceive' literally means 'to take together', and is used in the New Testament for catching fish, and for Jesus when He was taken prisoner. So the idea is to take, or to seize or to catch; so lust or desire when it catches, or seizes us, brings forth sin. If the fish ignores the bait, however attractive it may look, it does not get caught; so with us, however attractive the temptation, and the prospect of following our desire, may look when we are enticed, if we turn away and don't take the bait, then we are not caught and we don't sin. Our Lord Jesus refused the temptations of satan, indeed He said *"Get you behind me satan"*. He identified the source of the temptation, realising who or what was drawing Him away and refused in

a firm manner. James tells us to *"Resist the devil and he will flee from us"*. So if you are tempted to feel angry, for example, you will feel the beginnings of anger within your body, and feelings and thoughts of annoyance within your mind. However attractive the prospect of being angry may look, and also the pleasure of inflicting strong words or even violence on someone may seem, there is the choice to say, "Get behind me. I will by God's grace possess my soul in patience" and the more we act in such a manner, the more a righteous pattern of behaviour will develop in our lives. Our flesh begins to learn some discipline and we develop self-control; however we must never be complacent and must always be watchful.

Many Christians struggle to identify the difference between sin and temptation. It was a problem for the author until helped by a church elder, with the comment "That is not sin, it is just temptation". The relief was huge and the freedom wonderful. So again, as we have seen the need to know ourselves after Christ, there is the need to know ourselves when we are just being tempted, when there is still a choice to walk away. We also need to know if and when we have actually crossed the line and brought forth sin. To see that an item is attractive and valuable and be tempted to steal it, is only temptation; only when we take it, is it sin. We need to be very careful though in the area of sexual lust. Jesus says *"If a man looks on a woman to lust after her, he **has already** committed adultery in his heart"*. So if a man looks at a woman with the deliberate intention of lusting and imagining immoral things with her, he is already in sin. One assumes a woman could have immoral desires, in just the same way, towards a man. Clearly Potiphar's wife did so toward Joseph with awful results.

We are being very honest and looking at how not to let the enemy have any 'place' in us and how he will try to find a place. We have no choice but to look at these areas of our lives, the Bible speaks about them and they are so relevant if Christians are to know the power of God in their lives; the wages of sin is death and separates us from the Lord. As has been said, we need great care in this area of immorality, indeed any kind of sexual sin. If, however, in any part of our life we do sin, John tells us, *"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"*. If we sin, as soon as we sin and are aware of that sin, we must confess the sin and have it washed away so that satan has 'nothing' in us and 'no place' to continue to mount an attack against our souls and establish further territory in our lives. Sin of a sexual nature leaves its mark on our lives. It of course can be forgiven and the effects marginalised in the extreme, but we must be very careful and ensure we are not brought into this type of sin. John though tells us, *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light the blood of Jesus Christ His Son goes on keeping us clean from sin"*. The blood, which removes our sin and sins, when we go wrong, also keeps us clean when we walk in the light with God, in true fellowship with Him. This is the freedom which Christians should and really must experience.

It is possibly wise at this point to look at just how Jesus dealt with the temptations He endured in the wilderness. We have made reference to this earlier, but it is such a vital thing to learn, so looking in more detail will help us in our quest to ensure that the prince of this world has 'nothing' in us. The response to the first temptation is, perhaps, the key, although all are relevant. Jesus' reply to the temptation to turn stones into bread was; *"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"*. The word for 'word' in the Greek language is 'rhema'; 'the living word' or, possibly better, 'the heard word'. So Jesus was a man who heard the word of God. Colossians tells us to *"Let the word dwell in you richly with all wisdom"* and that is exactly what Jesus had done and what we all must do. We must treasure the words which God speaks to us and really let them live in our hearts. Jesus said *"If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you will and it shall be done for you"*. That is an amazing promise and perhaps one of the

secrets of Jesus' own life. It is why He saw so many answers to prayer and overcame in all His temptations, and why we **really** need to hear God and **keep** His word in our hearts. Nothing less than the genuine word of God will do, making it up in our own imaginations just won't stand when the temptation comes.

If we look into the psalms, David as a prophet, with the Spirit of Christ within him, speaks the testimony of our Lord Jesus. *"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"*. In psalm 119 we read, in many ways, the outworking of the challenges of a servant of God living on the earth as a human being. (Please read the psalm closely, the key to understanding the psalm is to realise this is all the experience of a servant, Jesus was the true and ultimate servant of God). At the beginning of psalm 119, we read of the blessedness of those who walk in the ways of God, keep His laws and testimonies and seek Him with their whole heart. Verse 3 tells us that *"They do no iniquity"*. That is a wonderful truth and gives hope for all servants of God, in particular our Lord Jesus, of not committing sin as the will of God is worked out, in the likeness of human flesh, upon the earth. Jesus achieved exactly that in His life. As we have said **"He had no sin"** but He had to work that out practically in His own life and experience. So the practical question is in verse 9, *"How shall a young man cleanse his way?"* The answer: *"By taking heed according to your word"*. In other words how can I keep clean and free from sin in the way in which I live and walk. The answer: to listen closely and pay attention to God's words. Then we look in verse 10: *"Your word I have hidden in my heart so that I will not sin against you"* The word for 'your word' in the Hebrew is equivalent to 'rhema' in the Greek. It is the living word, or the heard word, the word which finds a place in the heart and brings forth faith in the hearer. So the answer to living free from sin, having been, as we have seen, made free from the nature of that sin, is to hide the living word of God in our hearts. The Hebrew word for 'hide' is 'tsaphan', which means to **'treasure up'**.

So we need to listen carefully and pay great attention to the words that God speaks to us, to believe them and allow them to find a place where they can take root and grow. These words become the 'Sword of the spirit', which is the 'Word of God', for us to use in the spiritual battles we fight. That is exactly the weapon our Lord Jesus used in His dealings with satan. The words we treasure minister faith to us constantly in our hearts, and that faith becomes our shield. We need to follow Jesus and His example, and keep the truth of His words and faith in our hearts. We then have something firm and real with which to resist the devil when he seeks to set a trap for us and draw us away, by our own desires, and bring forth sin in our lives.

So we are practically working through the issues of how to ensure 'the prince of this world has nothing in us'. We have looked at hearing the word of God and taking heed, in other words listening very closely to what God says and treasuring that word in our hearts. We must also be aware that there are many other words and many other voices which try to influence us in this world and take us away from the Lord Jesus. When **we** believe them **we** give them a place in our hearts; whatever or whoever we believe, or put our trust in, must as a consequence have a place in our hearts and minds. We need therefore to be careful to what we listen and how we listen, and to understand who and what we believe, and therefore we move to the advice given to us by John in his first letter. John says this to us *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now*

already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. Hereby we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error".

We are told to try, or prove, or test the spirits and see whether they are of God, and not to believe every spirit, only to believe when we have tried, and tested the spirit, and **know** it or they are genuinely of God. There is no hurry to believe, we must wait until we are sure that it is God who is speaking; of course we don't want to delay, but even in this world tests can take a little while for the results to come through. So don't hurry, often the false prophet is very impatient for us to take what they say as true, and follow them. The true word of God will cause us to follow Jesus Christ and not a human being or an organisation. Behind every 'voice' in this world is a spirit. The prince of this world is the spirit behind them all, but there are individual spirits and voices. The prince is this world, as we have seen, is always seeking to have 'something' in us and that will happen if and when we believe a spirit which is not the "Spirit of God". This, in many ways, is the spiritual warfare all Christians are involved in. It is the heart, the motivation in the voice and the attitude for which we must listen. That which is **behind the words**, and the question is whether that spirit is Christ or antichrist. In the book of the Revelation we read in picture language of the beast which *"Looked like a lamb but spoke like a dragon"*. It is the heart, the voice, the attitude which is important, not the outward appearance. Jesus said *"The words I speak to you they are spirit and they are life"*; that really is the test. As Adam soon found out, the words which the serpent spoke to Eve, and she passed on to him, were spirit and they were death. The word of God warning Adam *"In the day that you eat you will die"* was really spirit and life and to keep Adam from 'death'. The serpent provided the bait, enticed Adam and Eve with not only the beauty of the apple, but also what would be the outcome of eating of the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. They were drawn away and sin was conceived, they were joined to the sin and it brought forth death.

I hope you understand these things, Jesus described satan as the 'father of lies', so all deceptions ultimately come from him. He is the originator of all untruths and when we believe something which is untrue we are agreeing with satan, and that will give him 'something' in us. John tells us *"The whole world lies in wickedness"* or *"the wicked one"*. The NIV translates it *"and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one"*. That is simply why there are so many deceptions in the world, and most cultures are based on things which are not true and yet believed so strongly by people in that culture. Why? Because there is a spirit behind the lies which will be very convincing and that spirit has power when believed. Jesus of course is the greater power or authority and can give us freedom; we are so encouraged to know that *"Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world"* as we then have the power to overcome in this *"crooked and perverse world"*

So there are only 2 options; Christ or antichrist. Is there or is there not the testimony in this voice, or word, or prophet, of Jesus Christ come in the flesh? For example, earlier, as the basis of this teaching we have looked at the teaching regarding 'being made free from the principal, or nature, of sin'. The spirit of Christ will give a testimony of "Christ come in the flesh"; "If Christ be in you, the spirit is life because of righteousness". Please understand it is not that Jesus came in the flesh as a man on the earth, yes of course He did, and that is the wonder of the gospel, but that, if we are true Christians, He is now come into my flesh, into your flesh, into your life and mine. He produces His testimony in us, as a result of the law of **His spirit of life** being in us. This testimony: "He has made us free from the law of sin and death". There are other voices and other spirits but they won't, and more so they

can't, provide this testimony; they have not the testimony of Christ come in the flesh; they are antichrist. So try them, prove them and what are they saying. Are they bringing forth fruit unto God? There are of course other ways in which the testimony of Christ in the flesh works out in Christian lives. John tells us that the testimony, or witness, of God is greater than that of men, and His testimony is that we have eternal life. That too will be the true testimony of Jesus Christ come in the flesh; "I know I have eternal life". That life starts as soon as we receive the Lord Jesus and will be evident in our lives, the way we live, and give us great joy in our Saviour and salvation. Hallelujah.

John tells us there are many false prophets already in the world. They can be the spokesman for any movement, philosophy, lifestyle, religion or doctrine as well as being a Christian or Jewish prophet. In fact many of the philosophies and lifestyles become religions in practice, even though they don't have a faith in some sort of god. They form a pattern of belief and behaviour which people follow. Many religions have 'Their prophet' but what is the testimony? The secularists have their prophets who speak out what they believe, the evolutionists and the scientists too; even though they are speaking against religion, they still want people to believe them and have 'faith' in what they say. In the Old Testament many of the false prophets promised great things which were not true. Some promised, for example, victory in battles which never were achieved, others that God's judgment would not come, when it did come. They were false prophets; liars in truth, and we discovered who is the 'father of lies' and from where their falsehood came. It is interesting to read the account of Micaiah the son of Imlah in 1 Kings, chapter 22, which gives real insight into the operation of false prophets. Many of the 'false prophets' these days, may even be in business ideas, offering all sorts of success and prosperity and blessing which will never come about. However, because of hopes, expectations and ambitions within their own hearts, people are vulnerable to falsehood and promoting of false hopes, sometimes which are believed as part of the culture in which we grow up. All these things must be submitted to God and then there is 'nothing' in us that the enemy can use against us. People who go that way seek what the Bible calls "*The pleasures of sin for a season*", and Paul writing to Timothy mentions those who "*oppose themselves*"; when we follow the pleasures of sin and falsehood we 'oppose', or work against or damage, our own souls.

There are many 'voices' within the culture and traditions with which we have been brought up. The traditions of forefathers, passed down through many generations, have great power in the things they speak. The things which we inherit spiritually through the sins and practices of our forebears oppose us too. The history of nations and their past have great power also, and are part of the spirit of the culture under which we are brought up. There is great national pride for most nations, or sometimes it is more a tribal or an ethnic allegiance, and many get taken up with nationalism and tribalism. The differences between tribes and cultures, and between nations and peoples is one reason for all the wars in the world, as each fights for land and supremacy, one over the other. These conflicts are translated also into politics and sport in modern times, sport being a great medium in which these battles can take place, either between local teams or at a national level. The supporters become very obsessive, and with all these 'interests' the whole thing becomes very demanding and controlling and can take over the lives of human beings, totally consuming their thinking and time.

These things which cause wars and fighting and competition do not have within them the spirit of Christ which says "*Love your neighbour as yourself and pray for those who despitefully use you*". Personal ambition can be worked out through business, politics, sport, and so on, but does not have the spirit of Christ in it which says "*What advantage is it if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?*" and "*Let him that is the chief among you be the servant*". James in his letter tells us "*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within*

you"? (NIV). These desires/lusts, whatever we call them, are developed in human beings partly because of their upbringing and education; they are part of the spirit of the culture, nation and environment in which they are born. The sins and practices of our forebears in our family, tribe or culture give the powers of darkness added strength to dominate our lives with these practices. The desires are also partly from our flesh and also from the selfishness in our own hearts; in most of these things there is a combination of factors which provide the 'something' in us for the enemy. As we have said, the prince of this world has place in our natural man because of our origins, that which is of our first birth, which relates back to our forefathers and of course eventually back to Adam; also to Eve, in one way, as she is described as *"The mother of all living"*. These things, or a combination of them, can establish, what Paul describes as 'strongholds' for the enemy on our lives. We will look at them and how to deal with them later; but this explains to us not only the need to be 'born again' which removes, as we have seen, the old spiritual nature, which originates in our first birth, from within us, but also *"To put to death the deeds of the flesh that we may live"* (Romans 8.13). We are to do this through the spirit, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ which are in us. This is the testimony of Jesus Christ come in the flesh and shows we are of Christ, and not antichrist. *"If you walk in the Spirit you shall not fulfil the lusts/desires/natural instincts of the flesh"* (Galatians 5.16).

So why are people, Christians also, so vulnerable to all these forms of temptation and yet our Lord Jesus was able to resist them so well? We need to see that temptations work against the three possible areas of vulnerability, which all human beings possess. We need to look at and compare what Eve saw when shown the 'forbidden fruit', *"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise"*, and John's description of the love of this world, namely *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"*. We can see that there are three aspects to the fruit and three aspects to the love of this world. The first aspect is that it is 'Good for food'; this relates to the lust of the flesh. Secondly it is 'pleasant to the eyes'; this relates to the lusts of the eyes, and thirdly 'to be desired to make one wise'; this relates to the pride of life. We will then see how the three temptations which Jesus endured worked against these three areas of potential weakness and see how He overcame each temptation. We will then understand how temptations come against the same three areas in our lives. There is often great emphasis, at least there used to be, on lust of the flesh and all aspects of immorality among Christians. There seems to have been less emphasis, although they are just as important, on the lust of the eyes, which includes greed and covetousness, which of course is idolatry, and the pride of life which involves ambition and self-promotion.

Jesus' first temptation was with the basic lusts, or desires, of the flesh. The desire to eat and survive, we are told by scientists, is the strongest urge known to humans and is stronger than the sexual urge to procreate and continue the species. So the enemy tempts a very hungry and weak Lord Jesus to satisfy the urges of His flesh to turn the stones into bread; *"If you are the Son of God"* is Satan's usual opening gambit. All temptations against Christians really are to tempt us to move out of our submission to God and are an attack on our new nature. It is our new heart which is holy and pure and does not go on causing us to commit sin. However the temptation, the bait if you like, is to go against that nature and enter into sin; really it is a lie, and yet if we can be caused to believe a lie, the enemy has 'something' in us to cause us to act wrongly, whether in heart, mind or body. Jesus

had the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, hidden, as we have seen, and yet living in His heart, and uses that to resist satan and refuse to listen to his subtlety.

Many cultures have traditions which promote the desires of the flesh, some traditions relate to food and eating and some to sexual practices and marriages and so on. Most cultures seem to be able to provide excuses for all sorts of immorality and greed. These ways can, and indeed will, set up patterns of thinking in hearts and minds which can direct someone, with a belief in such practices, away from the word of God. These are strongholds; the more we believe them the stronger they get, and can provide ground and excuse, for example, for making adultery acceptable, calling it 'taking a second wife', or maybe a third or fourth, but the Bible still calls it adultery. In other cultures, particularly in Western society in recent times, homosexual practices and marriages are now acceptable and even legal. It seems that they are ok now even for Christians. The Bible is quite clear that all these things are wrong and an abomination as far as God is concerned; you can change the law but you cannot change the biology. However such thinking can lead into bad ideas and practices, as far as God is concerned, and then into sin; sin is still sin, God is the judge. Divorce is almost universally accepted and acceptable in all cultures and yet the Lord Jesus said that *"It is because of the hardness of your hearts that Moses wrote you a bill of divorcement"*. The hardness of heart provides 'something', where there should be 'nothing' for the prince of this world, and sin is then inevitable. With all of these types of wrongdoing, whether fornication, adultery, uncleanness, gluttony, and in the words the NIV uses, orgies and drunkenness, there is a requirement to harden the heart to commit the sin. Our conscience, that little voice of knowing what is right and wrong, has to be ignored for us to sin in such a way. The hardness of heart is what provides 'something' for the prince of this world, and the more we harden our hearts the bigger the 'place' for satan becomes.

Some upbringings and cultures, or a combination of both, teach things which silence the conscience in the young people and children before it has time to develop, and then there is no voice, no warning, in the conscience and no safety mechanism for their lives. The 'something' for satan is huge and is why awful atrocities take place which make the news headlines. It is why psychopaths and tyrants develop which cause horrendous suffering at individual and nations levels. Hardness of heart relates to all the 3 areas of temptation, not just to that of the flesh. To steal is really following the 'lust of the eyes', and involves hardening of the heart and going against the conscience. Each time a thief steals it gets easier, and how big then is 'the place' for the enemy? Jesus was tempted in this area when all the kingdoms of the earth passed before Him in a moment of time. Jesus' response, *"You will worship the Lord your God and Him only will you worship"*. No bowing down to the prince of this world, the father of lies, for our Lord Jesus, and there should be none for us either.

The 'pride of life', the third 'love of this world', is all about ambition and self-promotion. The NIV uses the words *hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy*. They well describe what happens when pride and ambition have their way in lives, and hearts are hardened. These 'lusts' cause huge damage in human lives, both for the victim but also the perpetrator, who damages his or her own soul and puts themselves at risk of hell fire. *"Godliness with contentment is great gain,"* and the mystery of godliness is *"God manifest in the flesh"*. It was true in the Lord Jesus and must be so in us when we have the testimony of Jesus Christ come in our flesh. This 'coming' produces godliness within us and when we are contended in life, the two combine to provide us with something of great spiritual gain, which will keep us from the lusts of the

flesh and following covetous desires. This is the testimony of Christ in our flesh; we are of Christ and not antichrist.

The 'place' the prince of this world has when we hate and are bitter towards someone else, when we hold unforgiveness in our hearts, is huge. Not only can God not forgive us, if we will not forgive others, but the ground in us provides an occasion for the flesh and a launching pad from which satan can operate against those whom we hate or will not forgive. It damages them and it damages us also. Peter tells us that we are to *"Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul"*. The word for 'war' is again a military term, which means to 'set up camp, a place of military attack, against'. Fleshly lusts give satan something in us to damage our souls, to harden our hearts and sow in us a root of bitterness. This will defile, or constantly spoil, our lives, and being 'a root', it can be very difficult, but not impossible, to remove. How many people, Christians too, have resentment and sadness and complaint constantly in their voice and in all they say? It is a root of bitterness which we are hearing and is a huge 'something' for satan, spoiling their whole lives, not only for themselves but their family and friends and, more so, for God too. He wants a sweet smell in our worship, and sweet water and bitter cannot come from the same source.

We could look at many more examples of how the prince of this world can find and have a place in us, and as we see with our Lord Jesus, when taken to the top of the temple, it is the word of God on which we must rely. *"You shall not tempt the Lord your God"*. Jesus was fixed in His heart as to who was the

Lord His God, and nothing would move Him from that place. Perhaps the resolve in His heart could be expressed as "I will not tempt Him in my own power and on my own behalf or satisfy my own pleasures and desires. I will only live by the word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, knowing that He will meet all my need, and in any event I don't want anything from satan or his help in any shape or form". This is the testimony of Christ in the flesh and is a great example for us to follow, if we are to have the testimony of Jesus Christ come in our flesh, not just in word but in action.

We continue in our search to ensure that the prince of this world has no place in us, and now need to look also at these verses in Colossians chapter 2. *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"*. There is a verse earlier in the same chapter *"And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words"*. The word deceit and beguile are the same in the Greek language and Paul describes satan beguiling Eve. So this word means to act in such a way as to deceive, to find a place in the heart and then cause the person to take an action which is contrary to truth and the will of God. Here we see "Beware in case any man". It is a human being doing the deceiving and yet in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul mentions satan deceiving. The simple truth is that humans and satan work together, he works in the children of disobedience, and they conspire to deceive. Often the human element will be unaware of how they have been taken up as a weapon against you and against God through their philosophy or vain deceit, but nevertheless they have done so and that is the truth.

The word spoil means *"carry off as spoil, lead captive"* Again it is a military term and is part of the spiritual warfare Christians are all in. This concurs with the constant warfare in the history of Israel, God's people and nation; their warfare natural, ours spiritual. So beware that you are not spoiled, or taken off captive, by the enemy of your soul; then he will have 'something' in you, you will be his prisoner. Again there are 2 choices, 'after the rudiments of this world' or 'after Christ'. It is the same as we have seen before, Christ or antichrist, the world or our Lord Jesus. Rudiments/elements are a

putting in order, like A, B, C, D, or 1, 2, 3, 4. So these things are based on the natural, but yet spiritual, order set out by the things of this world and come from a natural or carnal logic, and not according to faith in Christ. So much in this world is based on the wisdom of this world, *"The mind of the flesh"* or the carnal mind, which we are told cannot be subject to God's laws. Such thinking is why we have so many problems in this world.

We have to work in the order on which things are based, so we come to the 'traditions of our fathers'. We could call them ancestors, forebears, or whatever description we want to use for our natural origins, whether it be family, tribal or national. Probably the closer we are to the origins, the greater the influence. Family upbringing will have more influence, usually, than national, but all traditions in culture come from our fathers and are based on the rudiments/elements of this world and not after Christ. From these traditions comes the philosophy and vain deceit which can take us away captive into its thoughts, ways and ideas. Philosophy is the love of wisdom of this world, and can be in any culture, and will be what is considered the generally perceived wisdom in, for example, that tribe. The wisdom of one culture will often seem very odd and different to someone from another culture and vice versa. Paul encountered the Greek form of this wisdom on Mars Hill in Athens, where he preached the resurrection of our Lord Jesus; God's answer to the wisdom of this world, *"Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"*.

We read *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God"*. So the wisdom of the world leads its people, and therefore us, if we go that way, to deny God and have no knowledge of the living God. Believing in evolution is an example, as it replaces the creator with creation; it makes humans the top of the creation and 'gets rid' of God altogether. It will produce a life without any relationship with the living God, who made all things by Jesus Christ; evolutionism says "God did not create the world". The teaching of evolution is now a legal requirement in all primary schools in England. The wisdom of this world looks to find solutions to life's problems without God; it utilises human efforts to solve all their own needs. It cannot, in truth, solve the problems. The outworking of sin in human hearts is only too apparent in modern society. It has been all through the centuries as human beings have no answer to their sin. However the wisdom of this world, by appearing to have the answers to human problems, provides a deception and also a false hope. This is vain deceit; vain means empty, without substance, and yet many get taken up with all the world offers, only to find, in the end, it has nothing to offer. Of course it looks attractive, it must do to deceive people, it is just like the apple offered to Eve, but it leads nowhere except to spiritual and eternal death. This world cannot provide eternal life which is the most needful thing for every human being. Faith is the opposite; this is the way of God, that everything we need may come through His grace into our lives. Faith has no part in the rudiments of this world. Rudiments are roots, the basics, fundamental things; so faith has no roots in this world's ways but in the word of Almighty God and in the integrity of His words. Faith takes us into the possibilities of God and causes us to look to our Lord Jesus and His coming into our flesh; we are of Christ, not of antichrist.

We have mentioned strongholds; as we have seen, these can be established in many ways in our hearts and minds, and we have looked at some of the sources and methods. We have seen how sin is the original stronghold, but how that is removed through the reconciling work of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through receiving Jesus, we have the authority to be called the sons of God, and indeed are sons of God. We are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus and placed under His loving authority. Jesus brought many sons to glory as the *"Captain*

*of our salvation”, and we therefore must “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that you may be blameless and harmless, **the sons of God**, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, **among whom you shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life”**.* So we are sons by our nature, and yet we have also seen that we can have strongholds in our lives which need to be removed. They can come from many ways but overall are based in our hearts and minds by the principles of this world and the ways it teaches. For us to increasingly live free to God and to have ‘nothing’ in us as a place for the prince of this world, we need to be able to remove, or better allow God to remove, these strongholds. The word for ‘stronghold’ is from where we get the English word ‘strategy’, or plan. The world is full of strategies, or plans, in business, in war, in life. The Bible talks about the strongholds in us, which are part of satan’s strategy to have a hold over us, and to have ‘something’ in us. The secret is how to deal with the strongholds.

It is not part of this teaching to explore how the Children of Israel possessed the land of Canaan, which was their inheritance. It makes a good Bible study for you to do and to see the principles on which the strongholds of Jericho, Ai, Hebron, and so on were overthrown. The cities were possessed originally by the old inhabitants of the land and, after their overthrow by Joshua and the armies of Israel, by new inhabitants. In the instructions given by Moses to the children of Israel before they entered into the ‘promised land’, there was the command to “Destroy all the inhabitants of the land”.

We read in Number chapter 33 verse 55 *“But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which you let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein you dwell “*. Here is the warning to us all, that if we do not pull down the strongholds they will be a constant source of spiritual discomfort to us in our lives. *“Pricks in the eyes”* is like getting a piece of dirt in the eye; it will prevent trouble-free vision to see where we are going spiritually. This is perhaps why many Christians struggle in their lives, they cannot see clearly, either the Lord Jesus with the ‘eye of their understanding’, or the way ahead. The enemies living in the strongholds, whether spiritual, mental or physical, will rise up from time to time, often at crucial and important moments. They will try to take command of our lives, challenge the authority of the Lord Jesus and our Christian faith and testimony, and may cause us great difficulties, if we allow them. Things such as pride and selfishness can make Christians stubborn and uncooperative just at the moment God wants to move us on. The children of Israel did not destroy all their enemies and lived in compromise with them. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why they failed to fully serve the Lord. It is definitely why they served the gods of those other nations, who lived among them, and went off into idolatry. Therefore the people/things which were not destroyed were ‘something’ in them which the prince of this world could use to spoil their lives and their relationship with God. If we look at the account of the sin of Achan who took the forbidden items, Adam and Eve had also of course eaten forbidden fruit. The whole of Israel were defeated by Achan’s sin and lives were lost, all through his covetousness. Achan and all that he had, everything that had any connection with him, had to be destroyed before Israel could move on to victory again. Achan means ‘trouble’ and he really did cause Israel trouble, and Achan was very definitely ‘something’ for the enemy to use against Israel. We will be troubled too if we do not put off things which could give satan ‘something’ in us, and again we see how vital it is that we don’t allow the prince of this world ‘something’ in us. None of us, as we have said, of course, is perfect. God only looks at the parts of our lives He has dealt with or has wanted to deal with. The children of Israel

possessed the land bit by bit, city by city, stronghold by stronghold, and that is how it works in our lives. It is when we resist the work of God to overthrow totally the strongholds, which He has identified and brought to our attention, that they become a 'place' in us which gives satan a hold over us. Paul says *"I press on to the mark"* and so must we.

We must also draw attention to the verse in Galatians chapter 2, *"For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor"*. So it is clearly possible to 'build again' things which we have already 'destroyed' and allow them back into our lives. Christians who have been delivered from alcohol or cigarettes, for example, can be, and have been, tempted to try them again and been brought back into addiction. Often it is more difficult to be delivered the second time. There are illustrations again in the Old Testament in the accounts of warfare and battles they fought. Just around the time when Samuel became the High Priest, we are told that some of the villages which belonged to Israel were now occupied by the Philistines. Through Samuel's intercession and the following battle, these villages, and maybe towns and cities too, were gloriously liberated. So it is possible to 'build again' that which we have destroyed; it can be something of the flesh in any area of our lives, but through the intercession of our Lord Jesus, *"He ever lives to make intercession for us"*, we can, of course, be liberated again. We need to repent, which is a realisation we have got it all wrong, confess our wrongdoing and have the sin washed away from our hearts and lives.

In Hebrews chapter 10 we read of 'drawing back'. It refers to moving away from the position in which we are justified by faith and faith alone. It could be taking up some religious position in which we trust in religious practices and not in the work of the Lord Jesus alone. There were issues with circumcision in the early church and that being said to be necessary for salvation. Drawing back could involve having trust in some other idol or being taken up by some other interest. Idolatry is putting something before our Lord Jesus and serving it, whether it is a piece of stone, or our business and money, or sport, or family. Many things can become idols; John in his first letter, in the very last verse, says *"Little children keep yourselves from idols"*, identifying the many dangers for Christians and the need to be watchful. Idolatry of course gives satan something in us as we are serving him rather than God, and Jesus said, *"You will serve the Lord your God and Him only will you serve"*. 'Drawing back' means we stop pleasing God in our lives and the Bible says *"We draw back into perdition"*. This means the state of being lost; it could mean losing land or territory.

There are many things which were happening, healing and deliverance, for example, in the early church which have now been lost, at least in a great measure, by the church today as it has moved into areas of unbelief. It is not the intention of this teaching to look at the controversial issue of whether or not we can lose our salvation, and what is being described here has no reference to that at all. However if by 'drawing back' from our position of faith we can lose 'land or territory' in our souls and lives through unbelief or uncleanness or pride and so on, the territory we lose must inevitably become 'something' for satan. All these things we have mentioned are the dangers, pitfalls and risks for Christians which is why we highlight them, for your edification, and why Peter says ***"Be sober, be watchful"***, to think soberly means to have a disciplined mind; *"to be spiritually minded is life and peace"*

Proverbs 25 verse 28 says *"He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"*. The NIV translates it this way; *"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control"*. The American Standard Version; *"He whose spirit is without restraint is like a city that is broken down and without walls"*. The message for outward protection is clear; to ensure that our 'spiritual walls' are strong and our lives are a stronghold **against** satan, we must

have rule over our own spirits. 'Outward protection comes from inward discipline'. That is quite a good motto to remember. It is allowing our Lord Jesus to have and maintain His authority in our hearts and spirits which enables us to be protected from the prince of this world, and prevent him ever having a place in us. We have received the spirit of a 'sound mind', better a 'disciplined mind'. The word for 'sound' comes from the Greek word for 'safe'. A disciplined mind is safe and secure, it is well protected, and needs to be if we are to serve our Lord Jesus with all our hearts in this life, ready for that which is to come. *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe"*.

Paul writing to the Corinthians says this, *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"*. We rejoice that we have weapons which have real authority, and are powerful enough to overthrow any and all strongholds in our hearts and minds. 'Pulling down' really means to 'overthrow'. The strongholds here are described as *"Every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God"*. Read Isaiah 18 and see how 'Lucifer the son of the morning' exalts himself to sit where God sits. That is now his aim in this world, to usurp the place of God in the hearts and minds of human beings, and very much his aim in the lives of Christians. Satan does not have any right to Christians, Jesus has bought us with a price and we belong to Him, but Satan covets that right and will employ every method to exalt himself in our lives. He does it through our imagining or imaginations. The word for imaginations in the Greek is 'logismos' from where we get the English word logic. 'Logismos' is also used for 'reckon' so is about calculation. It is the logic or the natural reckoning of this world which exalts itself against the knowledge of God. We saw earlier the word 'rudiments' or 'elements' which meant the setting out in order. This is how imaginations or reasonings work and how in this world, over the centuries, little by little they have risen up with all sorts of ideas and idols, in the many and various cultures, against the knowledge of God. We have looked at them in this teaching and they are everything from religion, culture and tradition to science and evolutionism, to uncleanness and moral sin, and to pride when we think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. This comes, of course, from 'adding up' our own view of ourselves and getting far too big an opinion of who we are and what we do. But all these things determine lifestyle and the way people live, and the faith in which they operate in this world, and where and what they put their trust in. These imaginations or reasonings exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. To know God brings what Jesus called meekness and lowliness of heart. It brings submission and it brings obedience. Paul says that the weapons of our warfare bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Every thought being obedient to Christ brings us back to the testimony of Jesus Christ come in our flesh, for if our thoughts are captive to Him, under His rule and authority, that will provide, not only in word but also in deed, the testimony of Jesus Christ come in the flesh. It is the Spirit of Christ which we must believe, and never any other spirit, for only then are we of Christ and not of antichrist.

Paul says this **'is war'** and describes our weapons in Ephesians chapter 6. Please read and understand. But if this is war then what are our weapons and how do we use them? I would suggest the weapon is the *"Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. Paul said he had no glory, no boasting, in any other thing; so if this was his boasting, in what did he boast and why? In 2 Corinthians 4.10 we *life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body"* The dying of the Lord Jesus, His cross, was a constant in Paul's life. He carried the effect of it, in his life, all the time, when and where ever he

was. So what is the effect of the cross? Romans 6.6 *"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"*. Firstly, as we have seen, it puts to death the old man or the old nature. It renders it inactive so it has no 'place' in our lives and gives the prince of this world 'nothing' in us. Galatians 5.24 *"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts"*. For those who belong to Jesus Christ, and only for those, their passions and desires (NIV), the normal natural desires of body, heart and mind are put to death in the cross of our Lord Jesus. They are rendered inactive and provide 'nothing' for the enemy.

Galatians 6.14 says *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"*. The world is made dead to me and I to the world. All that is of this world with its ways, teaching, cultures, practices and knowledge is made dead to me. It has no more power, no more place. Not only that, but the world is put to death **in me**. Both of the power bases, the places from which the world can launch an attack to try and control my life and your life, are put to death. They are rendered inactive; God was just making doubly sure we were, and are, free through the power of the cross of our Lord Jesus. So the world has 'nothing' in you and me.

In Colossians 2.15 and 16 *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it"*. So every ordinance and every principality and power in this 'world' and that which is to come, has been defeated in the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross; He triumphed over them. The power of His cross and the authority Jesus has as a result of His death and resurrection means no principality or power, no 'spiritual wickedness in high places' has authority over you and me, unless of course we allow them. They have been overthrown with all their reasoning and imaginations.

Galatians 2.20 says *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God"*. The truth of the cross is that *"I am crucified with Christ"*. I was put to death in His death. 2 Corinthians 5 tells us that *"If one died for all then were all dead, (or all have died), that those who live should no longer live unto themselves but unto Him who died and rose again for them"*. So being joined with Jesus in His death, the one dying for all, means I am put to death together with Him. Paul then says *"I live"*. Yes I am alive but it is no longer the 'I' but Christ who lives in me. 2 Corinthians just puts it another way *"We which live should no longer live unto themselves, for their own aims, ambitions, desires and passions, but unto Him who died and rose again for them"*; no longer are we self-centred but Christ centred, not only in our aims but in very life itself. This is the work of the cross; the *"life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me"*. My life, your life, our lives are ones of faith, trusting God for all He has done for us; living like this we do not frustrate, or disannul, or make void, the grace of God, but live in the full benefit of it. This is our weapon; it is the cross which has dealt with everything that could give the prince of this world 'something' in you and in me. We read, *"Always bearing or carrying it about"*. It is constant, it has to be constant, we can live like this all the time, and living like this **I really live, you live, we live**; we live unto God.

2 Corinthians 4.11 says *"We which live are **always** delivered to death for **Jesus' sake** that the life also of Jesus should be manifest in our mortal flesh"*. We are alive but now we lay down our new lives for

the Lord Jesus; it is an 'always' thing too. When we live as living sacrifices we have the manifestation, or showing, or shining forth, of Jesus Christ in our mortal flesh. This is the testimony of the experience of Jesus Christ come in the flesh. We have the testimony of Christ, not antichrist; we belong to Him, and He to us; and the prince of this world has 'nothing' in us, for we are all in Christ and Christ is all to us. Hallelujah