

THE CHRISTIAN TROUBLED AND TRIUMPHANT

STUDY ONE: THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN TRIUMPH

The Tension of Triumph and Trouble

Some Christians seem to live in constant fear and failure. Others seem to know a secret of continuous and unending triumph. Yet others find the Christian life a mixture of trouble and triumph, never living wholly in one or the other. What, then, are the facts? For the mixture of triumph and trouble see Matt. 5:3-11; Rom. 8:31-39; II Cor. 4:7-15; Phil. 3:10; Acts 14:22; II Thess. 2:4-5; Rom. 8:19-25; II Cor. 6:3-10; 11:23-29, etc.

Another matter which troubles believers is their constant failure in life. Romans 7:13-25 seems to be their lot. Paul, too, knew great weakness and even fear; see II Cor. 1:8-11, 7:5, 12:1-10. Rom. 8:22-23 speaks of Christians in convulsion, groaning. Revelation chapters 13-14, cf. Heb. 11:32-38, shows Christians under dreadful pressure. Colossians 1:24 (cf. Eph. 3:13, Phil. 3:10) shows suffering to be part of Christian living.

There seems then to be a contradiction. The Christian is said always to be in triumph (II Cor. 2:14; I Cor. 15:55-57) and even to triumph over Satan (I John 2:12-14). On the one hand he is said to be dead to sin (Rom. 6:6-10), to the world (Gal. 6:14), and the flesh (Gal. 5:24), and yet he is in constant conflict with them. How, then, can these things be?

The Basis of Christian Triumph

(a) God is Creator of His own world, and all is under His sovereignty. He is 'faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19).

(b) God has planned all things from before time, i.e. He has planned all of history in which are. our creation, our salvation and our glorification. See Ephes. 1:1-14; 3:1-11; Rev. 10:1-7; II Tim 1:9-10, cf. Isaiah 43...6-7; 46:8-10; 48:3-8.

(c) God has intervened in man's situation by Christ, and has accomplished great victory, Gal. 1:4-5, 2:20, 5:24, 6:15, Heb. 2:14-15, Col. 2:14-15, I John 3:9, 4:9-10, 13, Rom. 8:36, Matt. 1:21.

Saturday a.m. February 7th 1987. G. Bingham

STUDY TWO: THE ROOT OF ALL TROUBLE

A True Creation Subjected to Disharmony

Creation was totally harmonious when God created it (Gen. 1:31, Eccles. 3:11, cf I Tim. 4:4). Isaiah 45:18 shows God's purpose for, and in, creation. It is a functional harmony by nature. In our previous study we saw the purpose of creation. Created by the Father (Psalm 33:6, 8, 148:5-6), the Son (John 1:1-4, Col. 1:15-17, Heb. 1:2, I Cor. 8:5-6), and the Holy Spirit (Job 33:4, Psalm 104:29-30, Gen. 1:1:2, Ezek. 37:1-14, II Cor. 3:6) it was a thing of joy (Job 38:4-7).

Disharmony came via (i) a celestial rebellion (cf. Rev. 12:1-12; Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezek. 28; cf. II Pet 2:4), and (b) a human rebellion (Gen. 3:1-6; Rom. 1:19ff.). Psalm 2:1-2 show the nations to be against God. In this they are aided and urged by principalities and powers (cf. Dan chs. 10,11, cf. Deut. 32:8).

Man Subject to Many Enemies

Man is now under a series of enemies:

- (a) in. John 8:31-36; Rom. 3:9; Prov. 5:22-23; II Pet. 2:19, i.e. its penalty, power, presence and pollution.
- (b) Death from sin, Rom. 5:12-21; 6:23; cf. Ephes. 1:1-5. Fear of death is a powerful factor in human oppression, cf. Heb. 2:14-15; I John. 4:18; I Cor. 15:55-56.
- (c) The law, as linked with death and judgement, Rom. 7:9, Gal. 2:19; Rom. 3:19ff.
- (d) The curse, Gal. 3:13, cf. Rom. 1:18ff. This equals the wrath of God, cf. Rom. 18ff.; I Thess. 1:9; Rom. 5:10.
- (e) Satan, I John 5:19; Ephes. 2:1-3; Heb. 2:14-15
- (f) The World and World Powers, Gal. 1:4-5; 6:14; 1 Cor. 1:21f.; Col. 2:14-15; Rom. 8:37f.; Eph. 6:12.
- (g) The Flesh, Rom. 8:5-8, 12; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 2:1-3.
- (h) Conscience, Heb. 9:14; 10:2; 2:22; Tit. 1:15; I Tim. 1:19.

Man in Tension Regarding God, Self, Creation and Celestial Powers

I Cor. 10:11 speaks of 'the ends of the ages'. The present age, Gal. 1:4-5; Eph. 6:12; (*aeon*= kosmos) and the age to come (Eph. 1:21; Heb. 6:4) thus speak of a conflict. It is often known as 'flesh and Spirit' struggle (Gal. 5:16-26). Because of the curse (Gen. 3:17L) creation has been subjected to futility. We are all in the groaning (Rom. 8:18-25). We have to live in this tension (dialectic). Can we then know victory? The answer is, 'Yes, via the Atonement'.

NCTM, Saturday a.m. February 14th., 1987. G. Bingham.

STUDY THREE: IN LIBERTY AND BONDAGE

The Believer is Totally Free

In Study Two we saw man under the power of some 8 enemies. Man is under these enemies by reason of guilt. When Christ took the guilt of man's sin and sins upon the Cross, defeated sin and death-sin's outcome- then man was set free completely. This had been Christ's promise (John 8:36 cf. Matt. 1:21; John 1:29), and when he 'judged sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3), then the believer-i.e. the person repenting and having faith- was 'justified from sin' (Rom. 6:7), and so sin's power was broken (Rom. 6:10-14.). From John 8:36, Romans 8:1-3, II Corinthians. 3:6, 17, and I Cor. 6:11 we see the combination of Christ, the Gospel (Word of God) and the Spirit liberates the person who believes. This freedom is objective, active and radical. One must *believe* this is so or one cannot proceed in freedom, cf. I John 5:4-5 and I Peter 5:8-9.

Warnings About Freedom

Whilst freedom -triumph over one's enemies and their bondage-is actual and total, it can be a heady experience for one formerly in bondage. Galatians 5:1-12 speaks of believers being alert to the bondage into which they can fall. In Galatians it is 'falling from grace', i.e. not remaining dependant upon grace, but going back to law. This can be seen in 1: 6-9; 2: 1 ff.; 3:15; 4:8-10. Legalism (here, in Galatians), antinomianism (Rom. 6:1, cf. II Pet. 1:19; Jude 4), intellectualism (Col.2:8), and asceticism (Col 2:20-23) are all enemies who will deceive. II Cor. 11:1-15 speaks of a seduction such as in Genesis 3. Thus with warnings vigilance is enjoined. One must be to be on the alert so that one does not lose one's freedom. See Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 6:10-11, Romans 13:11-14, I Peter 1:13-14. This is the same as living in, walking in, and being led by, the Spirit.

Free, But Living in Bondage

Romans 7:13-25 shows: (i) The law is-of itself-spiritual. I-redeemed man-am *of myself* carnal, i.e. 'human', not free-standing, incapable of moral attainment. (ii) Whilst I delight in the law of God after the inward man (Psalm 1), yet I have no power to obey it, *of myself*. (iii) Sin of itself is stronger than I am *of myself*, so that sin can force me by *itself*, and I cannot defeat it. I am forced to the conclusion that '*I-of myself-* am carnal, sold unto sin.' (iv) A law operates regularly within me, i.e. every time I would do good (and refrain from doing evil) sin is immediately present to thwart the law of mind (which is to do only good). I see then that whilst my mind (inner being) wishes to do God's will in law, sin inevitably defeats me at the point of action.

The Solution to Practical Bondage-Reliance on God

We will never be free until we see we are not free in ourselves. Every time we seek to accomplish anything apart from dependancy on Christ, i.e. abiding in Christ (John 15:1ff, Phil. 4:13), and the Spirit, i.e. walking in, and being led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25), we will fail. Through Christ we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37, cf. I John 4:4,

5:4). Of ourselves we will never know freedom. We are led in triumph, not triumphant of ourselves (17 Cor. 2:14). What we need to see more than anything is, that doing the will of God is not just 'not sinning' or even 'doing good'-as such-but doing the will of God in living, proclaiming the Gospel, loving the brethren, being rich in prayer, the study of God's Word-in other words Living in God's grace by faith, and not simply concentrating on not failing.

NCTM. Saturday a.m. February 14th., 1987. G. Bingham.

STUDY FOUR: IN HOLINESS AND UNHOLINESS

The Believer is Holy

That the believer is *holy* is seen from Ephesians 1:1 ('the saints'), I Corinthians 6:11 ('you were sanctified'), I Peter 2:9-10 ('a holy nation' cf. Exod. 19:5-6). This holiness was planned before time (Ephes. 1:4, I Peter 1:2), and is God's goal for all His people. In the light of this believers are exhorted to be holy (I Pet.1:13-17, cf. Lev. 11:44). This is no little thing, but there is a hunger in true believers to be holy (Matt. 5:4-14, Lev. 11:44). God is holy and it is natural for His people to be holy.

Holiness is a Gift

Holiness was planned for God's people and is His goal for them. God has accomplished this in two ways, at conversion: (i) He sanctifies the believer (I Cor. 6:11, I Pet. 2:9-10) which really means *He includes them in His holy people*. I Pet. 1:2, and II Thess. 2:12-13 mean He has planned this sanctification by election (cf. Ephes 1:3f). Thus in Acts 10 and 11 the Gentiles are included and Peter is shown in the vision that they are clean (cf. Acts 15: 6-11). (ii) This sanctification is based upon *the cleansing of the heart* promised in the O.T (cf. Ezek. 36:24-28, Jer. 31:31-34, etc.). This cleansing is by the work of the Cross (John 1:29, Matt. 26:28, Heb. 1:3, 9:14, 10:10-22, I Pet. 1:22, I Cor. 6:11, Titus 3:4-7).

The Christian in Unholiness

In one sense it is impossible for a believer to be unholy. He has been given the category of holiness, had his sins washed away, and has received the gift of a new heart. He has also been told he is 'dead to sin'. That he does sin-even with this new state of heart-is self-evident. In Romans 7:13-25 we see man battle sin unsuccessfully, for it is of *itself* stronger than he is of *himself*. In I John 3:9 we read that the person born of God does not sin, and *cannot* sin, since God's seed remains in him. Yet the believer does sin, and can become quite sick at heart knowing this. What then can he do? He can have thoughts which dismay him, actions which even shock him, until he wonders whether he has a new heart. In John's First Letter he finds tests of new birth-that he loves, does works of righteousness, does not sin, is kept from the Devil, and overcomes evil. These tests-meant to encourage-may discourage

Living in Holiness in an Unholy World

Firstly the believer needs to realise his new pure heart is *not* free-standing, i.e. man is only--ever-what he is in dependence upon God. The new heart does not guarantee anything-of *itself*. Hence the teaching of abiding in God, abiding in the Vine, abiding in love, and walking in the Spirit, and being led by him. Hence the teaching in Colossians 3:5-15 regarding putting

to death the things of the flesh, putting off what is fleshly, and putting on what is godly, living communally in true forgiveness, being bonded as a community by love. There teaching regarding Christian warfare-as in Ephesians 6:10-18, James 4:6-7, I Peter 5:6-9 and other places. There is also teaching of putting 'to death the deeds of the body' (Rom 8:12-13), so that holy life issues. There are the injunctions to cleanse ourselves (II Cor. 7:1, II Tim. 2:20-22), and to keep pure in conscience (Acts 24:15, cf. Titus 1:15, I Tim. 1:19, and the powerful advice of II Peter 1:3-12. Holiness is loving reverent obedience to God's will, and in this lies the true life of holiness, i.e. genuine Christian freedom. When we concentrate on holiness as an element separate from other elements of Christian living then we are in danger of legalism, asceticism, and terrible despair at our failure. Holiness is-like all other things of Christian living- a matter of grace.

NCTM Saturday a.m. February 21st., 1987. G. Bingham

STUDY FIVE: THE CHRISTIAN STRONG AND WEAK

The Christian is Strong

There is no question about it the Christian is strong. 'I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me,' 'We are more than conquerors through him who loved us,' 'This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.' 'We know that anyone born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.' 'I am writing to you young men, because you have overcome the evil one.' 'Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.' 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.' We could add many more quotes to this list. The Christian knows he does not have to sin- 'These things I write to you that you sin not'-is something the believer knows to be true. He has overcome the world the flesh and the Devil. 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' 'They overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb.' The Christian is even told, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' He is told that nothing can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.' In addition the believer is told that all his enemies are defeated. What, then, is left for him to do but to walk in victory? This sense of victory is often exhilarating to one who believes this to be. He experiences times when-it seems-nothing can defeat him. Often in worship he sings with great joy and assurance songs of victory.

The Christian is Weak

We have said in previous studies that the Christian of himself is weak against the enemies outside him, and indwelling sin. It said that 'Often Christians are whistling in the dark when they think they are singing in the light.' Triumphalists may even be people who have not faced up to the entire issues confronting them. Man-a guilty person before God-has always set himself to justify, vindicate and prove himself. Christians are open to this temptation and so they seek to assure others they are victorious, thinking it a shameful thing not to be wholly victorious. In Study 7 we will see the great issues that face believers, but here we can look at the matters of the deceptive and seductive enemies. Christians who face the fact of their weakness often groan and long to be other than what they are for 'They who fain would serve thee best, are conscious most of wrong within.' Whilst they ought to be even more conscious of the enabling grace of God, yet their anguish is a sign of their longing to live a holy life. Heb. 3:13 says that sin can deceive and the heart become hardened.

The Christian Faces Temptation

Jesus was tempted on a number of occasions. Because he relied wholly on God and His Word he did not fall in the temptation. Temptations really mean 'testings' and we do not *have* to fail. We can be tested in any and every way, and yet succeed. That is clear from I Cor. 10:13.

James said temptings (testings) strengthen us (James 1:2-4). He also showed that when we fail it is because of something within us (James 1:14), 'Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire'. We have seen that there is a preventative way of preparing for temptation, i.e. being vigilant and sober, alert and prepared.

What then is the nature of temptation for the Christian? A clue lies in Romans 8:13, 'If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you *put to death the deeds of the body you shall live.*' What does this mean? It means that the body-which is not evil- is subject to certain desires and drives which are not in themselves wrong. It is only when the mind and the body (cf. Ephes. 2:3) combine to overstep the mark set by true morality, that *the deeds of the body become the flesh.* Thus eating, drinking, looking, thinking and other natural deeds of the body (I Cor. 10:31) become fleshly. The flesh means 'man having his own way', i.e. not following God's way.

The Way to be Strong and Overcome Temptation

The first requirement is utter trust in God, dependence upon Him, abiding in Christ, being filled with the Spirit and walling in him. We have seen this in our others studies.

With this present dependence, must be the constant reckoning on God's unchanging, total forgiveness, together with His justification of us from guilt, otherwise failure will turn to guilt, and guilt being the power of sin-will grip us afresh (cf. Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:1, Rom. 6:14, I Cor. 15:55-58), and so bring a sense of separation of us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2).

The second requirement is that we recognise our weakness, and do not let it drive us to despair. There is a weakness which is just our humanity (Rom. 7:13-25, cf. II Cor. 12:1-11, Jer.. 10:23), and there is a compounding weakness which comes from deliberate sinning. If our weakness is from the latter, then we must 'put it off, or 'put it to death' (Col. 3:5-10). If it is the weakness of our humanity then we must realise great forces are against us, i.e. all our enemies and each one of them is stronger of itself than we are of ourselves, so that our abiding in God's power is the only way of victory. We must think, then, in terms of I Corinthians 15:55-58, II Corinthians 2:14, I John 4:4, 5:4, etc.

To Be Weak Is To Be Strong

In this present evil age we are more than conquerors in being 'killed all the day long' Romans 8:37ff. Being led in triumph does not mean we will not be martyred. See Revelation 2:10-11, 6:9-11, 13:7-10, 14:12-13. We must remember the tremendous power of weakness as set out-regarding Christ-in II Corinthians 13:4, and-regarding us-in II Corinthians 12:7-10. This has to do with humility and dependance upon God (Matt. 5:3ff.; 11:28; James 4:6-7, I Pet. 5:5-9). Suffering is the inevitable lot of all true believers, but suffering is indispensable to victory, as we shall see in our next study.

NCTM. Saturday a.m. February 21st., 1987. G. Bingham.

STUDY SIX: THE BATTLES LOST: THE VICTORY WON

Man Has Lost His Battles

Man lived in fulness until he rebelled against God. Then he lost everything—life, truth, true understanding, total obedience, full human freedom. As we have seen he became subject to the powers of darkness (I John 5:9; Ephes. 2:1-3; I Tim. 2:26). He had lost the battle for his life (cf. Rom. 5:12ff.). Romans 1:18-32, cf. 3:9-18 portrays man in his state of continual defeat, better known as ‘death’ in the Scriptures.

Christ Has Won the Battle

In Genesis 3:15 God announced his plan to defeat the serpent and his evil. In Genesis 49:10 Jacob prophesied that one would come who would rule— the nations. Abraham had previously been told he would inherit the earth, and Psalm 2—talking of the nations opposing God and His Messiah—prophesied that the nations would bow to Messiah (Cf. Phil. 2:11). Jesus—God’s Messiah— came and defeated the powers of darkness as King of the Kingdom. In particular in the Atonement (the Cross and Resurrection) he proved stronger than the Strong Man, and took away his armour and weapons, mainly the guilt of the human race. Thus—as we have seen previously—he won the battle against sin, death, the law, Satan, the world and its powers, flesh and conscience. Believing man, then, has been released from the power of these things.

God’s Victorious People— His Children

It is clear from I John 2:12-14 and similar passages that the truly victorious people on the earth are the believers, Christ’s Body the church. Of course they only have victory in Christ, as we have also seen (II Cor. 2:14; I Cor. 15:55-57; I John 4:4; 5:4). But their battle has been won in the Atonement, and whilst they live in ‘the word of the Cross’ they are secure from their enemies.

As a result of Christ’s victory his people wish to proclaim the powerful message of the Gospel to all the world, and in the course of this meet with fierce opposition, and persecution. This does not much matter provided they put on the armour of God, and are secure in Christ, and ‘love not their lives unto death’. They can go on living in victory.

The Lost Battles of Believers

These are of two kinds. The first is that through failure to be alert, vigilant, and sober, believers have lost battles. There are reports of these in the New Testament as well as the Old. Paul and Barnabas had a ‘provocation’ (Acts 15:39), Mark failed in his journey with Barnabas and Saul (Acts 15:38, cf. 13:13). Peter failed in the matter of grace (Gal. 2:11f.), Demas went

to the world (II Tim. 4:10). In the church at Corinth there was boasting over gifts; there was a case of incest, believers were taking brethren to pagan courts, and there were divisions in the community. From other Epistles, and the 2nd. and 3rd. chapters of the Revelation we see believers had lost many battles. Perhaps the primary one was the loss of love. Given in all of these lost battles, Christ's victory still stands. When the believer faces up to the fact of losing such battles, this does not alter God's grace for forgiveness, cleansing, healing, reconciliation and continuing in the new life. His victory stands unchanged.

The *second* lost battle-or battles- is that which comes from remembering the past, or being reminded of it, so facing the failures-which although forgiven and unremembered by God (Jer. 31:321-34) still confront us especially when the Accuser reminds of of those lost battles. Satan is a deceiver (Rev. 12:9), a liar (John 8:44), one who threatens (I Pet. 5:8), and a seducer (II Cor. 11:3). Perhaps his worst activity is accusation (Rev. 12:10, cf. Job 1:9; 2:5; Zech. 3:1-2). Believers now have sensitive consciences which can be accused (cf. Ezek. 36:31). Nothing is gained by entering into debate with the Accuser. Romans 8:1, Galatians 5:1, and Hebrews 10: are key verses. At the same time there is good advice in Acts 24:16, cf. Titus 1:1, Hebrews 9:14, 10:22, and I Timothy 1:5.

Christians lose many battles which they think they ought to have won, and would have done so had they been alert, thoughtful and prayerful. These are to do with others, especially with their children or family members. They have hurt others or themselves been hurt. They go through agonies via their memories. This is not necessary. Christ won that battle, too, on the Cross (Isaiah 53:4-6; cf Jer. 6:14 cf 8:22). Hurt is mainly a mixture of pride, self-pity, and anger, the anger being often at God as well as man. If hurts are treated as sins they will be seen to have been finished upon the Cross. A lot of distress about a failed past is from pride or fear of what people will think of us. God restores the years which the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25), and because of grace it is 'every man a penny' (Matt. 20:2-10). The believer needs to see that every battle he (or she) lost was taken up into Christ's suffering and dealt with. There is no need for special therapies, for God's healing is total. There is 'balm in Gilead' for God's people.

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STUDY SEVEN: THE CHRISTIAN IN TROUBLED TIMES

Trouble From the Beginning

I John 3:10ff. shows that from the fall of man (Genesis chapter 3) mankind has been split into two sections or 'families', i.e. the children of God and the children of the Devil. Jesus said that Satan was a both a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44ff.). This means, (i) there is no truth in Satan so that man can only live in a lie about everything-God, man, creation, etc.- and, (ii) that violence originates with this Evil One. In I John 3:11 John shows that hatred of God's true people by evil, springs from His elect people doing righteousness and loving the brethren, even if the brethren-like Cain- are evil.. Galatians 4:28-31 shows that those born of the flesh will always persecute those born of the Spirit. Biblical history-'salvation history'-bears out this constant principle. This is particularly seen in -the history of Israel as ungodly nations sought to destroy the people of God.

What we need to keep in mind is that those we call 'the people of God' are God's elect by grace (cf. Ephes. 1:3-14). Men are not *either* sinners *or* good people by birth or attainment. They are the true people of God-born of the Spirit- by grace, or they are those who remain impenitent.

The History of Trouble

We have suggested that salvation history shows that God's people have always been persecuted. Jesus' statement of Matthew 5:10-11 regarding persecution is not something new. It has always been so. There is always suffering for the sake of the Kingdom (Luke 12:32; 22:28-29; Acts 14:22; II Thess. 1:5; Phil. 1:28). The principle is, 'All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (II Tim. 3:12). Thus we have Cain persecuting Abel; Ishmael Isaac; Esau Jacob; Egypt, Moab, the Canaanites, Assyria, Babylon, and Rome persecuting Israel. The Jewish Sanhedrin persecuted the new Christians, various Jewish and Gentile groups persecuted the believers, and church history has shown that Rome violently opposed the church from time to time, and up to the present day Christians have been persecuted, beaten and destroyed, so that whole churches have been wiped out. Islam, Nazism, Fascism, Racial Nationalism, and Communism have been strong persecutors up to our present era, and the book of the Revelation depicts the finale of history when the forces of Gog and Magog will surround the camp of the saints, seeking to destroy it. Also is depicted Babylon the great city of evil and seduction which is cruel to the saints of God. Anyone reading the Scriptures must receive the strong impression that the people of God will never be out of trouble.

Trouble in the Present Time

The principle of I John 3:10-11 is our guide to the cause of trouble. Satan wishes to rule the heavens and the earth, and fallen man seeks to oppose his will against that of God (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; Psalm 2). Most in the world realise there is a battle between good and evil, but good and evil are not abstract. God is good: Satan is evil. Two armies are constantly opposing each other. This principle is set out in Luke 11:14-26. Jesus's statement was, 'He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.' Christ opposed evil by his presence and in his actions when a man on earth, in Palestine (Acts 10:38; Matt. 12:28; John 12:31; 14:30-31; 16:11 cf. Luke 22:53). 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 is a condensed version of the book of the Revelation chapters 5 to 21, for Christ is presently putting down all evil powers, and we are part of his army, part of that action, hence the battle of which Paul speaks in Philippians 1:27-30 (cf. II Thess. 1:5). No matter what righteousness, peace and joy there is in the Kingdom of God, there has to be much suffering for the Kingdom of God. God's people must recognize that this must be the case continually.

The Victory Christ Won and is Winning

I John 3:8-9 tells us Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil. The Devil tempted Christ to go the way of fame and signs and not the way of the Cross (Matt. 4:1-13, 16:21-23). He refused this and used the authority he had been given as Messiah to defeat evil in the forms of evil spirits, demonic illnesses, guilt-oppression and the like (Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:38). The conflict of the Cross and Resurrection was always ahead of him (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32), and it related-among other things-to Satan (John 12:31, 14:30-31). Satan's power lay in the fear of death, i.e. human guilt (Heb. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-15), but at the Cross Christ bore the sins and removed the guilt, thereby destroying Satan's power. His rising from the grave proved his power, and henceforth his presence would oppose and trouble all evil powers. All authority was his by reason of his victory, and this he delegated to his servants, so that they were to go and disciple the nations, wresting them from the powers of darkness (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13-14) and bringing them into liberation and light.

We need to imprint I Corinthians 15:24-28 on our minds and see it as it is worked out in Revelation. Christ is triumphant now, and so are his people (I Cor. 15:55-58; II Cor. 2:14;

I John 2: 12-14, 18-27, 4:1-4, 5:4-5; Rev. 15:4). Romans 8:35-39 shows us the constant conflict . but the continuing victory. II Corinthians is a book relating to the suffering of those who will preach the Gospel. See II 4:7-15 for a good example.

Conclusion To This Study of Trouble and Triumph

In our next Study we will see the ultimate triumph of Christ over his enemies, and of us over the enemies which beset us. The conclusion we draw in this present study is that of Paul, 'All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted'. We will never be free of this persecution, but we must not become morbid about it. It may require martyrdom in some cases (Rev. 6:9-11) but until that comes we ought not to worry. If we feel sorry for ourselves then we should read Hebrews 11:32-40. That will be an antidote against self-pity, and an encouragement to suffer, knowing that suffering brings glory (Rom.5:15, 8:18; II Cor. 4:16f.). By it we shall enter into the joy of our Lord.

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STUDY EIGHT: THE ULTIMATE TROUBLE AND TRIUMPH

The Continuing Tension

We may often think that ‘the trouble’ could largely have been avoided had we been more thoughtful, more astute, and-perhaps-more diplomatic. We might as well think that of Christ and his Cross. By nature of the case triumph and trouble must always be together. Whilst evil powers ever seek to dethrone God and enthrone themselves, the battle will continue. There is a law that means God will always be in conflict with evil powers when they seek to enthrone themselves, and His forces will always be in conflict when they insist on the triumph of God and the defeat of evil.

What we must realise is the principle Joseph by enunciated to his brothers, ‘You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.’ This links with Romans 8:28-that God is working all things for good for those who love Him. Thus the tension is a valuable one for it teaches us patience, creates good character, and prepares us for great glory (Rom. 5:3-5, II Cor 4:16).

A Problem With the Tension

The battle we wage is that of faith, i.e. we do not have to make things happen by faith, but believe-by faith-that God has done His work of salvation. When we come into ‘trouble’ we often put it down to our own sin, then seek to justify ourselves, when we should recognise that the godly will always suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12), and the battle will never cease. We must keep in minds the rules of battling-constant vigilance, constant obedience, continuing holiness of life, and unceasing proclamation of the saving word of God. We should not allow our energies to be drained by selfaccusation, or listening to the accusation of the enemies.

The Greatest Triumph of Our Lives

The triumph of salvation has already happened, (i) in history when Christ wrought salvation in the Atonement, and (ii) in our lives when this became a reality to us through the Word and the Spirit. In one sense we must keep looking back to both. We are-each of us- a witness to Christ and his saving power because we have been redeemed. The miracle of regeneration is the story of our lives. We must not forget that triumph, as also the extension of that triumph in the presence of Christ in our lives (I John 4:4, 5:4).

The Ultimate Trouble

The reason trouble will never cease in this ‘present evil age’ is that Satan will fight to the end, and more so at the last, because he knows his end is near (Rev. 12:12). If the believer thinks he has ‘trouble’ then Satan more! From Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 21:8 history is the story of hastening doom and judgement for all evil of fallen men and angels. We must make much of this fact. The fear of believers is unjustifiable-that their God is not a faithful Creator (I Pet.

4:19). Part of the vindication of God is that nothing will be left unjudged, unpunished, and unrequited at the end of this age. The Judge of all the earth will surely do right (Gen. 18:25; cf. Luke 18:1-8, cf. Rev. 6:9-11, 15:3-4, 16:4-6, 18:24-19:3). Evil's ultimate 'trouble' is God's ultimate triumph.

The Ultimate Triumph

We have seen that the eventual defeat of evil—once set and certified in and by the Cross and resurrection—is the first part of God's triumph. The second and richest part of it is what He will have accomplished in history, namely the salvation, sanctification and glorification of His elect people. Peter calls it 'the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ' (I Peter 1:14) when—as Paul puts it—we shall be to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:7, 2:7).

What often seems to be the defeat of God is that man has fallen, evil appears to triumph, and the creation is subjected to futility, i.e. bondage to decay (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). It seems—to appearances—that evil is stronger than God's good, and so triumphs now in the world. This may be so to sight but not to faith, and faith sees what is really so (II Cor. 4:16-5:7, Gal. 5:5, etc.). We must, then, believe the Word of God, its promises and its predictions, in which case the present tension will prove valuable to exercise and growth of faith.

The ultimate triumph will be the new heaven and the new earth (Matt. 19:28), Rev. 21:1-5, 9-22:5; II Pet. 3:8-14; 1 John 3:1-3; cf. Isaiah 65:17ff., 66:22ff.). This new creation will vindicate God as 'the faithful Creator', and show the powerlessness of the evil which sought to prevent the outcome of that glorification which will come to the creation once subjected to futility in the bondage to decay. Man will be glorified as a coheir with Christ of the inheritance of all things. All creation will be free, reconciled, filled up, harmonised, and at one with its Creator-Redeemer. God's people will be a 'kingdom of priests unto their God', and they will reign upon the earth forever. These things will be the cause and constraint for endless praise and worship to the Living God and the Lamb.

Living Now With Hope For the Future

We have seen from so many angles how the believer lives in the tension of trouble and triumph. Our purpose in taking these studies is to show that the Christian life is not one of unmitigated happiness, constant victory and uninterrupted success. Christians are apt to become disappointed and even depressed when trouble comes. They are easily convinced that they have failed, that there is something deficient in their salvation, and even that God is not active in His own creation. God is the God of all hope (Rom. 15:13), and he has flooded us with the Spirit of hope (Rom. 5:5), for His Son in us is 'the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27). To 'hope against hope' (Rom. 4:18) is to be assured that what is by sight hopeless, is in fact what God will surely do, for He is as good as His promise, and promises. When we have hope for a thing then we presently work in the light of that. The attack on faith and hope must be met with faith and hope because God's love—shed abroad in our hearts—is our present experience of the coming fulfilment. That is why we say the tension of trouble and hope are what build up the believer and train him for the day of glory.

In that day he will doubtless revel in his new-found glory, but primarily he will revel in the glory of God—for which and Whom he was created.