

J A N U A R Y 1

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO COURAGE

*Who among us has not learned from his own experience
that it requires another spirit than the world can
give to follow Christ fully?*

There are so many who profess Christ and so few who are in fact Christians; so many who go into the field against Satan, and so few who come out conquerors. All may have a desire to be successful soldiers, but few have the courage and determination to grapple with the difficulties that accost them on the way to victory. All Israel followed Moses joyfully out of Egypt. But when their stomachs were a little pinched with hunger, and their immediate desires deferred, they were ready at once to retreat. They preferred the bondage of Pharaoh to the promised blessings of the Lord.

Men are no different today. How many part with Christ at the crossroad of suffering! Like Orpah, they go a short distance only (Ruth 1:14). They profess the Gospel and name themselves heirs to the blessings of the saints. But when put to the test, they quickly grow sick of the journey and refuse to endure for Christ. At the first sign of hardship, they kiss and leave the Savior, reluctant to lose heaven, but even more unwilling to buy it at so dear a price. If they must resist so many enemies on the way, they will content themselves with their own stagnant cisterns and leave the Water of Life for others who will venture farther for it. Who among us has not learned from his own experience that it requires another spirit than the world can give to follow Christ fully?

Let this exhort you, then, Christian, to petition God for the holy determination and bravery you must have to follow Christ. Without it you cannot be what you profess. The fearful are those who march for hell (Revelation 21:8); the valiant are they who take heaven by force (Matthew 11:12). Cowards never won heaven. Do not claim that you are begotten of God and have His royal blood running in your veins unless you can prove your lineage by this heroic spirit: to dare to be holy in spite of men and devils.

J A N U A R Y 2

YOU ARE PART OF CHRIST'S ARMOR

God Himself underwrites your battle and has appointed His own Son "the captain of [your] salvation" (Hebrews 2:10).

You should find great strength and encouragement in the knowledge that your commission is divine. God Himself underwrites your battle and has appointed His own Son "the captain of [your] salvation" (Hebrews 2:10). He will lead you on to the field with courage, and bring you off with honor. He lived and died for you; He will live and die with you. His mercy and tenderness to His soldiers is unmatched. Historians tell us Trajan tore his own clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds. The Bible tells us Christ poured out His very blood as balm to heal His saints' wounds; His flesh was torn to bind them up.

For bravery none compares with our Lord. He never turned His head from danger, not even when hell's hatred and heaven's justice appeared against Him. Knowing all that was about to happen, Jesus went forth and said, "Whom seek ye?" (John 18:4). Satan could not overcome Him—our Savior never lost a battle, not even when He lost His life. He won the victory, carrying His spoils to heaven in the triumphant chariot of His ascension. There He makes an open show of them, to the unspeakable joy of saints and angels.

As part of Christ's army, you march in the ranks of gallant spirits. Every one of your fellow soldiers is the child of a King. Some, like you, are in the midst of battle, besieged on every side by affliction and temptation. Others, after many assaults, repulses, and rallyings of their faith, are already standing upon the wall of heaven as conquerors. From there they look down and urge you, their comrades on earth, to march up the hill after them. This is their cry: "Fight to the death and the City is your own, as now it is ours! For the waging of a few days' conflict, you will be rewarded with heaven's glory. One moment of this celestial joy will dry up all your tears, heal all your wounds, and erase the sharpness of the fight with all the joy of your permanent victory."

J A N U A R Y 3

HEAD AND HEART

If your heart is not fixed in its purpose, your principles, as good as they may be, will hang loose and be of no more use in the heat of battle than an ill-strung bow.

He who has only a nodding acquaintance with the king may easily be persuaded to change his allegiance, or will at least try to remain neutral in the face of treason. Some professing Christians have only a passing acquaintance with the Gospel. They can hardly give an account of what they hope for, or whom they hope in. And if they have some principles they take kindly to, they are so unsettled that every wind blows them away, like loose tiles from a housetop.

When Satan buffets and temptation washes over you like a tidal wave, you must cling to God's truths. They are your shelter in every raging storm. But you must have them on hand, ready to use. Do not wait until it is sinking to patch the boat. A feeble commitment has little hope of safety when caught in a tempest. While that flounders and drowns, holy determination, grounded in the Lord, will lift up its head like a rock in the midst of the highest waves.

Scripture promises, "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (Daniel 11:32). An angel told Daniel which men would stand up and be counted for God when tempted and persecuted by Antiochus. Some would be taken in by the bribery of corrupt men; others would fall victim to intimidation and threats. But a few, who were firmly grounded in the tenets of their faith, would do great things for God. That is to say, to flatteries they would be incorruptible, and to power and force, unconquerable.

Head knowledge of the things of Christ is not enough; this following Christ is primarily a matter of the heart. If your heart is not fixed in its purpose, your principles, as good as they may be, will hang loose and be of no more use in the heat of battle than an ill-strung bow. Half-hearted resolve will not venture much nor far for Christ.

J A N U A R Y 4

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO SERVICE

*Those sins which have lain nearest your
heart must now be trampled under your feet.
And what courage and resolution this requires!*

The soldier is summoned to a life of active duty, and so is the Christian. The very nature of the calling precludes a life of ease. If you had thought to be a summer soldier, consider your commission carefully. Your spiritual orders are rigorous. Like the apostle, I would not have you be ignorant on this point and will, therefore, list a few of your directives.

Those sins which have lain nearest your heart must now be trampled under your feet. And what courage and resolution this requires! You think Abraham was tested to the limit when called upon to take Isaac, "thine only son . . . whom thou lovest" (Genesis 22:2), and offer him up with his own hands. Yet what was that to this: "Soul, take the lust which is the child dearest to your heart, your Isaac, the sin from which you intend to gain the greatest pleasure. Lay hands on it and offer it up; pour out its blood before Me; run the sacrificing knife into the very heart of it—and do it joyfully!"

This is more than the human spirit can bear to hear. Our lust will not lie so patiently on the altar as Isaac, nor as the Lamb brought dumb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). Our flesh will roar and shriek, rending the heart with its hideous cries. Indeed, who can express the conflict, the wrestlings, the convulsions of spirit we endure before we can put our heart into such a command? Or who can fully recount the cleverness with which such a lust will plead for itself?

When the Spirit convicts you of sin, Satan will try to convince you, "It is such a little one—spare it." Or he will bribe the soul with a vow of secrecy: "You can keep me and your good reputation, too. I will not be seen in your company to shame you among your neighbors. You may shut me up in the attic of your heart, out of sight, if only you will let me now and then have the wild embraces of your thoughts and affections in secret."

J A N U A R Y 5

STAY ON COURSE TO THE END

We have known many who have joined the army of Christ and liked being a soldier for a battle or two, but have soon had enough and ended up deserting.

There are times when a saint is called to trust in a withdrawing God. “[Let him] that walketh in darkness and hath no light . . . trust in the name of the Lord” (Isaiah 50:10). This requires a bold step of faith—to venture into God’s presence with the same temerity as Esther into Ahasuerus’s. Even when no smile lights His face, when no golden scepter is extended to summon us to come near, we must press forward with this noble resolution: “If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

Which leads our faith one step further: We must trust also in a “killing God.” We must declare with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15). It takes a submissive faith for a soul to march steadily forward while God seems to fire upon that soul and shoot His frowns like poisoned arrows into it. This is hard work, and will test the Christian’s mettle. Yet such a spirit we find in the poor woman of Canaan, who caught the bullets Christ shot at her, and with a humble boldness sent them back again in her prayer (Matt. 15:22–28).

Your work and your life must go off the stage together. Persisting to the end will be the burr under your saddle—the thorn in your flesh—when the road ahead seems endless and your soul begs an early discharge. It weighs down every other difficulty of your calling. We have known many who have joined the army of Christ and liked being a soldier for a battle or two, but have soon had enough and ended up deserting. They impulsively enlist for Christian duties, are easily persuaded to take up a profession of religion, and are just as easily persuaded to lay it down. Like the new moon, they shine a little in the first part of the evening, but go down before the night is over.

Taking up the cross daily, praying always, watching night and day and never laying aside our armor to indulge ourselves, sends many sorrowful away from Christ.

J A N U A R Y 6

THE SOURCE OF THE SAINT'S STRENGTH

God can overcome His enemies without help from anyone, but His saints cannot so much as defend the smallest outpost without His strong arm.

The strength of an earthly general lies in his troops—he flies upon their wings. If their feathers get clipped or their necks broken, he is helpless. But in the army of saints, the strength of the whole host lies in the Lord of hosts. God can overcome His enemies without help from anyone, but His saints cannot so much as defend the smallest outpost without His strong arm.

One of God's names is "the Strength of Israel" (1 Samuel 15:29). He was the strength of David's heart. With Him, this shepherd boy could defy the giant who defied a whole army; without God's strength, David trembled at a word or two that dropped from the Philistine's mouth. He wrote, "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight" (Psalm 144:1). The Lord is likewise your strength in your war against sin and Satan.

Some wonder whether a sin is ever committed without Satan having a part. But if the question were whether any holy action is ever performed without involving the special assistance of God, that is settled: "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Paul put it this way: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). We saints have a reservoir of grace, yet it lies like water at the bottom of a well and will not ascend with all our pumping. First God must prime it with His awakening grace. Then it will gush forth.

Paul says, "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Romans 7:18). Both the will to do and the action which follows are of God. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). God is at the bottom of the ladder, and at the top also, the Author and Finisher, assisting the soul at every rung in its ascent to any holy action.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S STRENGTH

"God uses the conscience to give some knowledge of His righteousness to all, so that no one can stand before Him on the Day of Judgment and plead ignorance" (Romans 1).

God alone is the source and sustainer of all life; therefore, it is His constant regenerating power that keeps the conscience alive.

Conscience may be defined as that divine influence at work in man to restrain him from sin. One evidence of its origin is that it always speaks against sin and for righteousness. Therefore, it cannot be the product of our own hearts, which in their fallen state are "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). God uses the conscience to give some knowledge of His righteousness to all, so that no one can stand before Him on the Day of Judgment to plead ignorance (Romans 1). When you become a Christian and consecrate yourself—conscience and all—to Him, the Holy Spirit begins in earnest to perfect you in Christ.

It is said when God made the world He ended His work of creation—that is, He made no more new species of creatures. Yet to this day He has not ended His work of providence. "My Father worketh hitherto," Christ said (John 5:17). In other words, He continually preserves and empowers what He has made with strength to be and to act. A work of art, when complete, no longer needs the artist, nor a house the carpenter when the last nail is in place. But God's works on behalf of both the outer and the inner man are never off His hands.

If the Father's work is a preserving one, the Son's is a redemptive one. Both acts are perpetual. Christ did not end His work when He rose from the dead, just as the Father did not end His work when He finished creation. God rested at the end of creation; and Christ, when He had wrought eternal redemption and "by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). From there He continues the work of intercession for the saint, and thereby keeps him from certain ruin.

J A N U A R Y 8

GOD'S PLAN FOR PROVISION

"The Christian ought to rely on divine strength because this plan results in the greatest advancement of God's own glory" (see Ephesians 1:4, 12).

If the provisions were left in our own hands, we would soon be bankrupt merchants. God knows we are weak, like cracked pitchers—if filled to the brim and set aside, the contents would soon leak out. So He puts us under a flowing fountain of His strength and constantly refills us. This was the provision He made for Israel in the wilderness: He split the rock, and not only was their thirst quenched at that moment, but the water ran in a stream after them, so that you hear no more complaints for water. This rock was Christ. Every believer has Christ at his back, following him as he goes, with strength for every condition and trial.

The Christian ought to rely on divine strength because this plan results in the greatest advancement of God's own glory (Ephesians 1:4, 12). If God had given you a lifetime supply of His grace to begin with and left you to handle your own account, you would have thought Him generous indeed. But He is magnified even more by the open account He sets up in your name. Now you must acknowledge not only that your strength comes from God in the first place, but that you are continually in debt for every withdrawal of strength you make throughout your Christian course.

When a child travels with his parents, all his expenses are covered by his father—not by himself. Likewise, no saint shall say of heaven when he arrives there, "This is heaven, which I have built by the power of my own might." No, the heavenly Jerusalem is a city "whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Every grace is a stone in that building, the topstone of which is laid in glory. Some day the saints shall plainly see how God was not only the founder to begin, but benefactor also to finish the same. The glory of the work will not be crumbled out piecemeal, some to God and some to the creature. All will be entirely credited to God.

J A N U A R Y 9

DON'T TRUST IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH

*“When we were without strength,
in due time Christ died
for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).*

Is the Christian's strength in the Lord, and not in himself? Surely then, the person outside of Christ must be a poor, impotent creature, helpless to do anything to effect his own salvation. If a living tree cannot grow without sap from the tap-root, how can a rotten stump, which has no root, revive itself of its own accord? In other words, if a Christian imbued with God's grace must continually rely on His strength, then surely the one outside of God's grace, dead in trespasses and sin, can never produce such strength in himself. To be unregenerate is to be impotent. “When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

The philosophy called humanism has long been a suitor to man's pride. It boasts in his natural strength and wisdom, and woos him with promises of great accomplishments now, and heaven later. God Himself has scattered such Babel-builders and proclaimed His preeminence for eternity. Confounded forever be such sons of pride, who trust in the power of nature as though man with his own brick and mortar of natural abilities were able to make a way to heaven! You who are yet in your natural state, would you become wise to salvation? Then first become fools in your own eyes. Renounce this carnal wisdom which cannot perceive spiritual things, and beg wisdom of God, who gives without rebuke (James 1:5).

Here is a word for Christians. Knowing your strength lies wholly in God and not in yourself, remain humble—even when God is blessing and using you most. Remember, when you have your best suit on, who made it and who paid for it! God's favor is neither the work of your own hands nor the price of your own worth. How can you boast of what you did not buy? If you embezzle God's strength and credit it to your own account, He will soon call an audit and take back what was His all along.

J A N U A R Y 1 0

STAND IN THE HOUR OF TESTING

*But if you conclude finally that God cannot
pardon or save, cannot come to your rescue,
this shoots faith through the heart.*

Without God's strength, you cannot stand in the hour of testing. The challenge is beyond the stretch of human fortitude. Just suppose all your strength is already engaged to barricade your soul against temptation and Satan is steadily hacking away at your resolve; what will you do? You need not panic. Only send faith to cry at God's window, like the man in the parable asking his neighbor for bread at midnight, and He who keeps covenant forever will provide. When faith fails, however, and the soul has no one to send for divine intervention, the battle is all but over, and Satan will at that very moment be crossing the threshold.

When you are in the midst of testing, do not give up in despair. Faith is a dogged grace! Unless your soul flatly denies the power of God, this courier—faith—will beat a well-worn path to the throne. Doubt cripples but does not incapacitate faith. Indeed, even as you are disputing the mercy of God and questioning in your mind whether He will come to your rescue, faith will make its way, if haltingly, into His presence. And the message it delivers will be, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

But if you conclude finally that God *cannot* pardon or save, *cannot* come to your rescue, this shoots faith through the heart. Then your soul will fall at Satan's feet, too disheartened to keep the door shut any longer to his temptation. Remember this: The one who abandons faith in the midst of a spiritual drought can be compared to the fool who throws away his pitcher the first day the well is dry.

It has ever been and always will be the Father's will that we trust only Him. God demands to be called the Almighty; He insists we place our confidence in Him. That child is wise who does as his father bids. Man may be called wise, merciful, mighty; but only God is all-wise, all-merciful, almighty.

J A N U A R Y 1 1

GOD'S DEAR LOVE FOR THE SAINTS

*It is this image of God reflected in you that so enrages hell;
it is this at which the demons hurl their mightiest weapons.
When God defends you, He also defends Himself.*

God's love for His saints sets His power in motion. He who has God's heart does not lack for His arm. Love rallies all other affections and sets the powers of the whole man into action. Thus in God, love sets His other attributes to work; all are ready to bring about what God says He likes. God considers all His creatures, but the believing soul is an object of His choicest love—even the love with which He loves His Son (John 17:26).

When a soul believes, then God's eternal purpose and counsel concerning him—whom He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world—is brought to term. Can you imagine the love God has for a child He has carried so long in the womb of His eternal purpose? If God delighted in His plan before He spoke the world into being, how much greater is His delight to witness the full fruition of His labor—a believing soul. Having performed His own will thus far, God will surely raise all the power He has in that believer's behalf, rather than be robbed of His glory within a few steps of home.

God showed us how much a soul is worth by the purchase price He paid. It cost him dearly, and that which is so hard won will not be easily given up. He spent His Son's blood to purchase you, and He will spend His own power to keep you.

As an earthly parent you rejoice to see your own good qualities reproduced in your children. God, the perfect parent, longs to see His attributes reflected in His saints. It is this image of God reflected in you that so enrages hell; it is this at which the demons hurl their mightiest weapons. When God defends you, He also defends Himself. Now knowing that the quarrel is God's, surely He will not have you go forth to war at your own expense!

J A N U A R Y 1 2

WHEN YOU ARE WEIGHED DOWN BY SIN

*If you fear you will one day fall
to temptation, grab hold of God's strength
now and reinforce yourself to resist.*

You can be absolutely certain that no sin is powerful enough to overwhelm God's strength. One Almighty is more than many "mighties"! He has shown His eagerness to rescue you over and over again. Provoked to the limit by His people's sins, what does He do? He issues a sweet promise! "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger," He declares. And why not? "... For I am God, and not man" (Hosea 11:9). It is as though he said, "I will show you the *almightiness* of My mercy!"

Who can doubt the omnipotence of God? We know he has power to pardon if He so chooses. But there is greater comfort than this for the believer; it rests in His *covenant* to pardon. As none can bind God but Himself, so none can break the bond He makes with Himself. These are His own words: "[I] will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). In other words, "I will drown your sins in My mercy and spend all I have, rather than let it be said that My good is overcome by your evil."

So when Satan terrifies you with his awful accusations against your soul, you can say with confidence, "It is God and no other who justifies me. He has promised to restore my life if I submit to Him. Has He ever broken a promise? Therefore, I have committed myself to Him as unto a faithful Creator."

If you fear you will one day fall to temptation, grab hold of God's strength now and reinforce yourself to resist. Believe you will be victorious on the day you are tested. Your Father watches closely while you are in the valley fighting; your cries of distress will bring Him running. Jehoshaphat called for help when pressed by his enemies, and the Lord rescued him (2 Chronicles 20). You can be just as sure of His help when you are pressed to the wall. Remind Him often of His promise: "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14).

J A N U A R Y 1 3

GOD ACCEPTS YOUR WEAK FAITH

Your heavenly Father is so eager to care for you, that while you are timidly asking for a nibble of peace and joy, He is longing for you to open your mouth wide so He can fill it.

Perhaps you find the duty of your calling too heavy for your weak faith. Look to God for strength. When you are sick of your work and ready like Jonah to run away, encourage yourself with God's words to Gideon: "Go in this thy might . . . have not I sent thee?" (Judges. 6:14). Begin the work God has given you, and you will engage His strength *for* you; run from your work, and you engage God's strength *against* you. He will send some storm or other after you to bring His run-away servant home.

Are you called to suffer? Do not flinch in fear. God knows the limits of your strength. He can place the load so evenly on your shoulders that you will scarcely feel it. But still He is not satisfied. His watchful eye is always on you, and when you stagger He picks you up—burden and all—and carries you to your destination nestled in the bosom of His promise: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape . . ." (1 Corinthians 10:13). How can you fret when you are wrapped in His covenant? Your heavenly Father is so eager to care for you, that while you are timidly asking for a nibble of peace and joy, He is longing for you to open your mouth wide so He can fill it. The more often you ask, the better; and the more you ask for, the more He welcomes you.

Go quickly now. Search your heart from one end to the other and gather up all your weaknesses. Set them before the Almighty, as the widow placed her empty vessels before the prophet. Expect a miracle of deliverance from the limitless resources of God. If you had more vessels to bring, you could have them all filled.

God has strength enough to give, but He has no strength to deny. Here the Almighty Himself (with reverence I say it) is weak. Even a child, the weakest in grace of His family, who can but whisper "Father," is able to overcome Him.

J A N U A R Y 1 4

YOUR HEART SHOULD BE RIGHT WITH GOD

*Because He loves you,
He will recall your ration of power
if it takes you out of fellowship with Him.*

If your heart is not set in the right direction when you appeal for deliverance, strength will not come. Ask yourself these questions when you feel shut off from God's power.

Am I really trusting God, and Him only, to meet my need? Or am I depending on my own resolve, my pastor, or some other outside source? All these things may be good, but they are only Christ's servants. Press through them to the Master Himself. Touch Him—and deliverance is yours.

Am I thankful for the strength I have? In a long-distance race, the contestants run at varying paces. Perhaps you are discouraged when you see so many strong ones pass you on the way to glory. Rather than cry after them, be thankful that you have the strength to run at all! Are you in the race? It is by God's grace and that alone; thank Him for the privilege. Remember this: Everyone (even the weakest saint) who finishes the race is a winner.

Has my pride stopped the flow of God's power? God will not keep supplying power if you use it for your own advancement. He knows how quickly you are carried away from Him on the wings of your pride. Because He loves you, He will recall your ration of power if it takes you out of fellowship with Him. All this He does for your own good, so that when your pride lies gasping, you will be forced back to Him.

God may call you to persevere in the face of overwhelming odds. Perhaps nothing that has been said answers your particular case. Your heart is clean before God; you have sincerely and prayerfully waited, yet God withholds His hand. Then you must resolve to live and die waiting, for that may be what He requires. What greater evidence of your faith and of God's grace at work in you than to persevere to the end!

J A N U A R Y 1 5

THE CHRISTIAN MUST BE ARMED

*“Put on the whole armor of God,
that ye may be able to stand against
the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).*

If by negligence or choice you fail to put on God’s armor and rush naked into battle, you sign your own death certificate.

The story is told of a fanatic in Munster who valiantly tried to repulse an invading army by shouting, “In the name of the Lord of hosts, depart!” But his unregenerate soul had no such commission from the General for whom he pretended to fight, and he soon perished. His example should teach us the high price to be paid for such folly. What brave but foolish language you hear drop from the lips of the most profane and ignorant among us! They say they hope in God and trust in His mercy; they defy the devil and his works. But all the while they are poor, naked creatures without the least piece of God’s armor upon their souls. Such presumption has no place in the Lord’s camp.

Paul’s admonition to put on armor falls into two general parts. First, a direction telling us *what* to do: “Put on the whole armor of God . . .” And second, *why* we should do it: “. . . that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

So to begin, every recruit in Christ’s army should be properly fitted with armor. The first question that comes to mind is, What is this armor?

We are told, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14), where Christ is presented as armor. The apostle does not exhort the saints simply to put on temperance in place of drunkenness, or for adultery to put on chastity. Instead, he tells them to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” implying that until Christ is put on, the creature is unarmed. It is not the man decked out in morality or philosophical virtues who will repel a full charge of temptation sent from Satan’s cannon; it is the man suited up in armor—that is, in Christ.

I speak now of the “girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness,” and so forth. We are instructed to “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:24), who is made up of all the graces. The point is this: To be without Christ and His graces is to be without armor.

J A N U A R Y 1 6

THE SAD STATE OF THE UNARMED SINNER

"Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12).

A person in a Christless, graceless state is naked and unarmed—totally unequipped to fight sin and Satan. In the beginning, God sent Adam out in complete armor. But by sleight of hand, the devil stripped him. As soon as the first sin was completed, "[Adam and Eve] were naked" (Genesis 3:7). Sin robbed them of their armor and left them poor, weak creatures. It cost Satan some fancy footwork to make the first breach, but once man opened the gates to let him in, the devil named himself king and brought to court a whole cortege of deadly sins, without ever drawing a sword.

Here is what I mean: Instead of confessing their sin, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God and became evasive in their dealings with Him. They blamed one another, shifting the responsibility for their disobedience rather than appealing for mercy. How quickly their hearts were hardened by deceit! Man's basic nature has not changed since that day. This is exactly the condition of every son and daughter of Adam; naked Satan finds us, and slaves he makes us until God, having bought us with the blood of His dear Son, comes to reclaim each penitent soul for service in His own kingdom.

"Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12). If you are not a kingdom child, you have no more to do with any covenant promise than a citizen of Rome has to do with the charter of London. You are alone in the world, without God. If you get into trouble, you must plead your own case. But if you are a citizen of heaven, God has power to grant you special immunity in any situation. And while the devil's spite is directed toward you, he dare not come upon God's ground to touch you without permission.

J A N U A R Y 17

WARFARE WITHOUT CHRIST

*Do not let anyone deceive you.
Spiritual darkness can never
be expelled except by union with Christ.*

What a desperate condition, for a soul to be left to his own defense against legions of lusts and devils! He will be torn like a silly hare among a pack of hounds—no God to call them off, but Satan to urge them on. Let God leave a people, no matter how militant, and before long they lose their courage and cannot fight. A company of children could rise up and chase them out of their own front yard. When the Israelites panicked at news of invincible giants and walled cities, Caleb and Joshua pacified them with this assurance: “They are bread for us; their defense is departed from them” (Numbers 14:9). How much more must that soul who has no defense from the Almighty be as bread to Satan?

Only an ignorant soul is foolish enough to ride out of his castle unarmed during a siege. He obviously has not studied the enemy, or he would know what peril lies beyond his gates. To make matters even worse, if he fights without putting on Christ, he must fight in the dark. The apostle writes, “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8). As a child of light, you who are Christians may be in the dark from time to time concerning some truth or promise. But you always have a spiritual eye which the Christless person lacks. The unregenerate man is always too ignorant to resist Satan, whereas the Christian’s knowledge of the truth pursues and brings back the soul even when taken prisoner by a temptation.

Do not let anyone deceive you. Spiritual darkness can never be expelled except by union with Christ. As the physical eye once put out cannot be restored by human means, so neither can the spiritual eye—lost by Adam’s sin—be restored by the efforts of men or angels. This is one of the diseases Christ came to cure (Luke 4:18).

J A N U A R Y 1 8

IMPOTENCY WITHOUT CHRIST

*Sometimes Satan and a carnal heart
appear to scuffle, but it is a farce—
like the parrying of two fencers on stage.*

When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). What can an unarmed soul do to shake off the yoke of Satan? No more than an unarmed people can do to shake off the yoke of a conquering army! Satan has such power over the soul that he is called the strong man who keeps the soul as his palace (Luke 11:21). If he has no disturbance from heaven, he need fear no mutiny within. He keeps everything under his control. What the Spirit of God does in a saint, Satan in a diabolical sense does in a sinner. The Spirit fills the heart with love, joy, holy desires; Satan fills the sinner's heart with pride, lust, lying. And like the drunkard filled with wine, the sinner filled with Satan is not his own man, but an impotent slave.

Friendship with sin and Satan is enmity toward God. A soul that refuses to put on Christ declares himself a rebel and makes himself the enemy of God. I think we can safely say that whoever is God's enemy must be Satan's friend—and how will you make someone fight against his own friend? Is Satan divided? Will the devil within fight against the devil without?

Sometimes Satan and a carnal heart appear to scuffle, but it is a farce—like the parrying of two fencers on stage. You would think at first they were in earnest, but when you see how wary they are and where they strike one another, you soon know they do not mean to kill. Any doubt is removed when you see them after the match, making merry together with the proceeds of their performance! Likewise, when you see an unrepentant heart make a great show against sin, follow him off the stage of good works where he has gained the reputation of a saint by playing the hypocrite. There you will doubtless see him and Satan together in a corner as friendly as ever.

J A N U A R Y 19

SATAN'S VAST EMPIRE

*If God's grace did not step in
and override the veto, the whole
world would be held in Satan's sway.*

When you look around and see the devil's vast empire and what a little spot of ground contains Christ's subjects—what heaps of precious souls lie prostrate under Satan's feet and what a tiny regiment of saints march under Christ's banner of grace—perhaps you ask yourself, “Is hell stronger than heaven? Are the arms of Satan more victorious than the cross of Christ?” But if you consider what I am about to tell you, you will wonder that Christ has any to follow Him rather than that He has so few.

Every son of man is born in sin (Psalm 51:5). So when the prince of this world first approaches a young soul with this or that wicked proposal, he finds the soul unarmed and in its natural state already familiar with his policies. Yielding to Satan's control will therefore not cause much of a stir in the naturally sinful heart. But when Christ campaigns for a soul, He proposes sweeping changes. And the selfish soul, which generally likes things as they are, answers Him with the same scorn as the rebellious citizens in the parable: “We will not have this man to reign over us!” (Luke 19:14). The vote is unanimous: All the lusts cast their ballots against Christ, and rise up like the Philistines against Samson, whom they called the destroyer of their country (Judges 16:23–24). If God's grace did not step in and override the veto, the whole world would be held in Satan's sway.

Satan's conquests are limited to ignorant, graceless souls who have neither strength nor sense to oppose him. They are born imprisoned to sin; all he has to do is keep them there. But when he assaults a saint, whose freedom was won at the Cross, once for all, then he is laying siege to a city with gates and bars. Sooner or later, he must retreat in shame, unable to pluck the weakest saint out of the Savior's hand. Doubt your own strength, but never doubt Christ's. In your gravest conflicts with Satan, trust Him to bring you out of the devil's dominion.

J A N U A R Y 2 0

THE MALICE OF SATAN

*Do you wonder that Satan works
so hard to dispossess the Gospel
which dispossesses him?*

Do not doubt for a moment that Satan will hurl all his fury at those who love God's Word. His acquaintance with the Good News of Christ goes back a long way, to the dawn of the ages, in fact. He has seen its power demonstrated over and over again, and he knows it houses an arsenal of arms and aids for battered souls.

The very first assault the Gospel made against the kingdom of darkness shook its foundation and put the legions of hell on the run. They are fleeing still. When the seventy missionaries commissioned by Christ returned with their reports that even demons were subdued by the power of the Gospel, Christ replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven!" (Luke 10:17-18). In essence He tells them, "What you say is not news to Me; I watched when Satan was cast out of heaven. How well I know the power of the Gospel!"

Do you wonder that Satan works so hard to dispossess the Gospel which dispossesses him? By the light of the Gospel many who were once his friends find the way to truth and life. By the same light, saints move with blessed assurance toward their eternal home. Nothing torments the devil more than to see his old companions neglect their former sinful pleasures and spend time studying the Scriptures instead. He knows that a saint without a knowledge of the Gospel is as vulnerable as an army without ammunition. Therefore, he labors either by persecution to drive God's Word away, or by political policy to persuade a people to send it away from their coast.

For it is God's Word which teaches us how to put on Christ and His graces so that we are fitly armed. Never flatter yourself into thinking you can do without this priceless book.