

Courage FOR THE CONFLICT

By CORNELIUS R. STAM

This is a duplication of the Bible Study Booklet written by Cornelius R. Stam, titled “Courage for the Conflict”. The duplication was done with permission from Berean Bible Society N112 W17761 Mequon Road, Germantown, WI 53022.

“...BE STRONG IN THE LORD, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to STAND against the wiles of the devil....that ye may be able to WITHSTAND in the evil day, and having done all, to STAND....STAND therefore...” (Eph. 6:10-14).

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“For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for WE ARE MADE A SPECTACLE UNTO THE WORLD, AND TO ANGELS AND TO MEN.

“We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

“Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;

“And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

“Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

“I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.

“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

“WHEREFORE I BESEECH YOU, BE YE FOLLOWERS OF ME.”

—I Cor. 4:9-16.

In these turbulent times there is the constant temptation to seek to escape realities.

Even upon the part of Christians—yes, and Christian ministers—there is apt to be a desire to avoid unpleasant facts and responsibilities; to just go on wishing things were better without facing up to the issues.

This is an alarming fact, for if ever there was a need for stout hearts, it is today.

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On every hand attempts are being made to re-establish some semblance of unity in the Church, but alas, most of them are at the expense of truth. They are simply get-togethers of those representing the various factions in the Church, at which nothing whatever is done to straighten out the differences between them—union meetings at which the great Bible truths at issue dare not even be discussed! Even labor and management in the world about us do better than this.

If the divine basis for unity in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6) continues to be ignored because so many Christians are afraid of the trouble it will cause to raise this issue before popular leaders, then the confusion of the Church must necessarily deepen and her influence upon the unsaved masses be diminished.

It is a divine principle that God will not give more light to those who do not stand for the light they have, and it is for this reason that we call upon all who have come to rejoice in the blessed truth of the “one body” and the “one baptism”—the most important issue confronting God’s people today—to show their colors boldly.

Perhaps it would help such to take up the Sword of the Spirit and enter the conflict if they realized more keenly what the opposition is against God, His purposes and His people. This opposition, coming, as it always has, from both men and angels, constitutes a call to particular courage and faithfulness on the part of every believer.

HUMAN OPPOSITION TO THE PROPHETIC PLAN

Just when Israel stood at the very threshold of her millennial glory; after the King’s forerunner had proclaimed the kingdom at hand; after the King had identified Himself, had died, risen, ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit—all according to prophecy—just then the favored nation revealed most emphatically her stubborn antagonism against the Lord Jesus.

Amid the wonders of Pentecost two of the apostles had healed a lame beggar who had daily sat at the gate of the temple, so that he had entered into the temple “*walking, and leaping, and praising God.*”

When Peter told the wondering multitudes who gathered, that this miracle had been wrought by the crucified, risen Christ, things happened quickly.

“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

“Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

“And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.”

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

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“And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

“And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (Acts 4:1-3, 5-7).

The next verses record those words which Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit” addressed to the Supreme Court of his nation.

The effect was striking.

“Now when they saw the BOLDNESS of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

That is, they were convinced in their own minds that the apostles had actually been with the risen Lord, or they, unlearned and ignorant men, could not have spoken with such boldness.

Nevertheless, the members of the Sanhedrin agreed to *“threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.*

“And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.

“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye,

“FOR WE CANNOT BUT SPEAK THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD.

“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go...

“And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said...” (Acts 4:17-24).

What *did* they say?

Did they say, “O, God, grant that none of these fearful things with which they threaten us may come to pass?” Did they say, “O Lord, be merciful and deliver us from this persecution?”

They did not. Their prayer was made of better stuff.

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This was a time for boldness. Wicked men, though religious men and the spiritual leaders of their nation, were standing in the way of the very truth of God. They, in their pride, would actually refuse to let Israel have the blessing which God offered and the apostles, humble as was their station in life, realized that the situation called for one thing more than anything else—*boldness!*

They did not even seem to think of their physical safety, for, blessing God for His sovereignty, they closed their prayers:

“AND NOW, LORD, BEHOLD THEIR THREATENINGS; AND GRANT UNTO THY SERVANTS THAT WITH ALL BOLDNESS THEY MAY SPEAK THY WORD” (Acts 4:29).

And their prayer was wonderfully answered, for the record goes on to say:

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with BOLDNESS” (Acts 4:31).

That Israel could withstand such testimony bears witness to the sinfulness of the human heart, but the opposition did go on until Stephen was stoned and a great persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

That the rejected Lord should stoop to save the very leader of this rebellion, Saul of Tarsus (See Acts 8:1, 3 and cf. I Tim. 1:15) was indeed a demonstration of *“the exceeding riches of His grace.”*

As Israel persisted in her blind rebellion, God raised up this Saul, later called Paul, to offer salvation to individuals everywhere, entirely through the merits of the cross.

The secret crisis had come. While Paul went to the Jews first from Jerusalem to Rome, it was simply that Israel might be without excuse, for Paul was never permitted to offer the kingdom to Israel as Peter had done. Rather he proved to them that Jesus was the Christ and declared that:

“Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;

“And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38, 39).

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HUMAN OPPOSITION TO GOD'S SECRET PURPOSE

Long before Israel rejected Christ, God had secretly purposed to show the riches of His grace to the world through the merits of His crucified Son.

Under the terms of the great Abrahamic Covenant the nations were to be blessed through the *multiplied* seed of Abraham (See Gen. 22:17, 18). But God knew that Israel would fail. Moreover it was necessary that they should learn that not by their own virtues, but only by the grace of God could they be of blessing to the nations. Hence God had planned that before bringing in the millennial blessing He would set them aside for a time in order to impress deeply the lesson which the present dispensation teaches (See Rom. 3:22, 23; 10:12, 13; 11:11-15, 32, 33).

Now at Antioch in Pisidia we find Paul preaching to the Jews, through whom the Gentiles were to have been blessed. After the service the Gentiles ask to hear the Word, and the next sabbath day finds nearly the whole city gathered together to hear the Word of God.

This, of course, should have delighted the Jews, but it did not.

“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

“THEN PAUL AND BARNABAS WAXED BOLD, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:45, 46).

Mark well: It was NECESSARY that the Word should first have been spoken to the Jews. Why necessary? Because that was the prophetic program. Salvation was to go to the Gentiles *through Israel*.

“BUT seeing ye put it from you...lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

This clearly indicates *a change in program*—and a change which never had been prophesied.

Here the Jews, God's channel of blessing to the Gentiles, rejected Christ, and Paul turns to the Gentiles *in spite of them*. This procedure had never been prophesied, but it was according to the secret purpose for which God had raised up Paul, that *other* apostle. Nor was it according to any covenant, but only and entirely according to the matchless grace of God. (Read carefully Eph. 3:1-3).

Little wonder that we read: *“And Paul and Barnabas waxed BOLD!”*

If it took boldness for Peter to preach Messiah to *gainsaying* Israel, what do you suppose it took for Paul to proclaim to an *envious* Israel that salvation was to go to the Gentiles in spite of their opposition? What boldness that required!

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This is why he writes to the believers at Rome:

“Nevertheless, brethren, I HAVE WRITTEN THE MORE BOLDLY unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God,

“That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles...” (Rom. 15:15, 16).

As the opposition mounted it required more and more boldness on the part of the apostle. To the Thessalonians he writes:

“But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, WE WERE BOLD IN OUR GOD to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention” (I Thes. 2:2).

But the opposition against God and His purposes and His people have not been from men alone. Angels too have had a great part in the conflict.

Many Christians are wholly ignorant—and inexcusably so—of their enemies in the heavenlies. They have a vague idea that all angels must necessarily be good. But this is far from the truth, for in this the angelic world is very much like the world in which we live; great numbers of them are *against* God.

Concerning some of these we read in Jude 6:

“And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

That only certain of them are thus bound, we shall presently see.

ANGELIC OPPOSITION TO THE PROPHETIC PLAN

When Satan, the highest of the angels, fell, many of the angelic host fell with him.

It is striking that we know the names of only two faithful angels: Gabriel and Michael—both chief princes. Indeed, from Gabriel’s own words in the 10th chapter of Daniel it seems clear that these were the only two of the highest angelic *princes* who had remained true to God.

“Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo; Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained [was superfluous] there with the kings of Persia.”

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“Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.

“BUT I WILL SHOW THEE THAT WHICH IS NOTED IN THE SCRIPTURE OF TRUTH: AND THERE IS NONE THAT HOLDETH WITH ME IN THESE THINGS, BUT MICHAEL YOUR PRINCE” (Dan. 10:12, 13, 20, 21).

Note that four angelic princes are referred to here. There is the prince of Persia and the prince of Grecia, who apparently stood in opposition to Gabriel, God’s messenger, and to Michael, the prince of Israel. In Ezekiel 28 we read of the prince of Tyrus, who very apparently is not a human being, but doubtless Satan himself. These and other princes are those whom Paul calls “the forces who control and govern this dark world.” (Eph. 6:12, Wey.).

Hebrew tradition says that there were seven such princes among the angels, but however many there were, one thing is certain, that only two of them stood together for God and His truth. These two were Gabriel and Michael. Remember Gabriel’s words: *“There is none that holdeth with me in these things but Michael, your prince.”*

How bitterly Satan and his angelic hosts opposed God’s prophetic program—that which had been “noted in the Scripture of truth.” Because of this opposition Daniel had to wait twenty-one days to get a prayer answered and Gabriel and Michael had to enter into conflict with hostile angels.

This opposition increased greatly with the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth. We see it in the intense activity among the demons at that time, in the attempts to have the Lord thrown over a cliff, stoned to death, drowned in the Sea of Galilee, crushed in the garden of Gethsemane.

Finally it seemed that Satan had won the day.

The multitudes in Israel had turned against the Messiah; the rulers opposed Him; even one of His own apostles had turned, and was ready to betray Him.

Do not overlook Satan’s influence in all this. In Luke 22:3, 4 we find how interested Satan was in the destruction of Christ:

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.

“And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them.”

How Satan must have rejoiced to see the Lord Jesus finally give up the ghost at Calvary! How he must have swelled with triumph! But he was wrong. He had not known that the Son of God had become the Son of man for the very purpose of grappling with death and overcoming it—*and him!*

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“THAT THROUGH DEATH HE MIGHT DESTROY HIM THAT HAD THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS, THE DEVIL;

“AND DELIVER THEM WHO THROUGH FEAR OF DEATH WERE ALL THEIR LIFETIME SUBJECT TO BONDAGE” (Heb. 2:14, 15).

ANGELIC OPPOSITION TO GOD’S SECRET PURPOSE

If Satan opposed the prophetic program and felt he had finally won a victory, how do you suppose he felt when that “victory” proved to be his defeat! How do you suppose he felt when he saw written in that cross, not his ultimate triumph, but his utter ruin!

And if Satan opposed the prophetic program, how much more bitterly would he oppose the unfolding of God’s eternal purpose and grace, which centers in the very cross where Jesus died!

To think that now through *what Satan himself had helped to accomplish*, God could reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to Himself in one body! This was irony indeed! And thus God takes the wise in their own craftiness and makes even the wrath of his enemies to praise Him! And thus believers draw calm and strong assurance as those who have “obtained an inheritance” in Christ, “being predestinated according to the purpose of *Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will*” (Eph. 1:11).

But in the light of this it is not strange that we find Paul, in his letters to the Ephesians, warning us against intense angelic opposition and calling us to particular courage and watchfulness.

“Finally, my brethren, BE STRONG IN THE LORD, AND THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT.

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to STAND against the wiles of the devil.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [lit., wicked spirits] in high places [in the heaventies].”

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to WITHSTAND in the evil day, and having done all, to STAND.

“STAND THEREFORE...” (Eph. 6:10-14).

And little wonder that the apostle closes this admonition with the following significant words:

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

“And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, THAT I MAY OPEN MY MOUTH BOLDLY, TO MAKE KNOWN THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL,

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“For which I am an ambassador in bonds: THAT THEREIN I MAY SPEAK BOLDLY, AS I OUGHT TO SPEAK” (Eph. 6:18-20).

How we need to pray this prayer for ourselves and for each other!

There is no such thing as standing faithfully for the message of grace without experiencing both human and angelic opposition.

No wonder Satan rages! But we must not tremble before him. We must remember that the cross spells his utter defeat. In Col. 2:15 we read what really happened at the cross:

“HAVING SPOILED [MADE SPOIL OF] PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS, HE MADE A SHOW OF THEM OPENLY, TRIUMPHING OVER THEM IN IT.”

Indeed, God has chosen us to make known to all the principalities and powers in the heavenlies—both good and bad—how He has answered Satan’s rebellion and turned it into glory for His beloved Son. In Eph. 3:8-11 the apostle says:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

“TO THE INTENT THAT NOW UNTO THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS IN HEAVENLY PLACES MIGHT BE KNOWN BY THE CHURCH THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD,

“According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

THE END OF THE AGE

Who knows how soon the dispensation of grace will end?

When it does, it will mean glorious deliverance for us who are saved.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (I Thes. 4:16-18).

It is significant that Michael, the archangel, is brought in in this connection, for when the Lord comes for us we are to be escorted through the enemy hosts into the very presence of God.

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But the end of this age will bring the horrors of the great tribulation to this Christ-rejecting world. And in this connection we find Michael and the angelic hosts again referred to:

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

“And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

“AND THE GREAT DRAGON WAS CAST OUT, THAT OLD SERPENT, CALLED THE DEVIL AND SATAN, WHICH DECEIVETH THE WHOLE WORLD: HE WAS CAST OUT INTO THE EARTH, AND HIS ANGELS WERE CAST OUT WITH HIM” (Rev. 12:7-9).

This casting out of Satan and his angels into the earth is what will bring in the “great tribulation,” the time of God’s wrath upon the world below.

In this connection it is interesting to read the first verse of Daniel 12:

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.”

Here we find God’s guarantee that Daniel’s people, the nation Israel, will be saved out of the tribulation.

After consummating His purpose concerning the Body of Christ, God will continue with his purpose concerning Israel. After the historical unfolding of His *secret* purpose He will resume the fulfilment of His *prophetic* purpose, as Paul writes in Rom. 11:25, 26:

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

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MEANTIME

Meantime let us faithfully proclaim the message of grace in all its purity and power, no matter what the opposition may be.

“The fellowship of his suffering” is a blessed privilege. May we not shun it, but rather stand with Paul, who said:

“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that WITH ALL BOLDNESS as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20).

Before God, then, let us take our stand with Paul, who, appointed to death and made a spectacle to angels as well as to men, said by the Spirit: “WHEREFORE I BESEECH YOU, BE YE FOLLOWERS OF ME” (I Cor. 4:16).