

Growing *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 35:10, Mark 10:45, Rom. 6:12–23, Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:16, Gal. 4:1–11, Col. 2:15.*

Memory Text: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (*Colossians 2:15, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Christ's victory on the cross defines the scope of the victory into which the Christian may grow.

The amendment to the church's fundamental beliefs, voted at the fifty-eighth General Conference Session (in 2005), was titled “Growing in Christ.” When the statement is analyzed, the following significant points become evident: Jesus has defeated satanic powers and evil forces; through Christ, victory over these powers, including their past manifestations in a person's life, is possible; and, finally, there are conditions in order for these victories to be realized in a person's experience.

These points will occupy our attention for the next three studies. This week we will be looking at the nature of the victory that Christ won on the cross. By His victory—not only over sin but over every other force that works against humanity and God's creation—Christ has achieved salvation for us.

As we seek to understand what Christ has accomplished in our behalf, we will be better prepared to understand what we can have in our lives now. His victory can be our victory if we claim it for ourselves, because, no matter what Jesus has done for us, we must choose to accept it. Victory is not automatically given to anyone.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.*

The Redemption

Christianity is “a religion of redemption,” in which people are saved from the devastation of sin through what someone else—in this case, Jesus—has done for them. Thus, the Christian religion may be distinguished from “a religion of law,” where one may rectify his or her doom by one’s own efforts at “doing good works.” We need this redemption because, according to the Bible, people without Christ are enslaved to sin (*John 8:34*) and under a death sentence (*Rom. 6:23*). They cannot free themselves from these two conditions. The sinner’s plight requires outside intervention, and this intervention comes at a price. As the New Testament so clearly teaches, that price was the death of Jesus on the cross.

What do the following passages reveal about the concept of redemption? *Isa. 35:10; Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4, 5; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.*

From the New Testament’s point of view, Christ’s redemptive death is sacrificial and substitutionary. He took our place, sacrificing Himself in our behalf, suffering our fate for us so that we don’t have to suffer it ourselves. Though some reject this idea because they don’t like the notion of someone suffering in place of another (especially in the place of someone who is guilty), that’s the heart and soul of the gospel message.

“When the New Testament speaks of redemption, then, unless our linguistics are at fault, it means that Christ has paid the price of our redemption. To the extent that the price paid must be adequate for the purchase in question this indicates an equivalence, a substitution.”
—Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1965), p. 61.

Think of some things in your own life that you find are impossible to change, things that you are absolutely helpless to do anything about. In the same way, we are absolutely helpless to save ourselves. How does this realization help us to better understand what Christ did for us on the cross? More important, how should this amazing truth of redemption impact our lives?

Slaves Set Free

When we understand redemption as freedom from a form of enslavement that required external assistance, we may conclude that sinful humanity is bound by a power or influence stronger than itself. The question that needs to be answered is, By what power or agency has sinful humanity been so bound?

Study Romans 6:12–23. Notice that in verses 18, 20, and 22, Paul speaks about freedom. What is the context of this freedom? What is Paul talking about here?

Think about what Paul says in the above verses along with what he says in Romans 6:1–11. Paul talks about what happens in Christian baptism. Here he sets forth some things that were to have died with Christ in baptism. Having spelled these out, Paul challenges the Christian, who has been united with Christ, to manifest the lordship of Christ, who has “freed” him/her from the power of sin.

The bottom line here is that, according to Paul, no matter how corrupted our nature has been by sin, through Christ we can be free from its enslaving power. Who hasn’t seen just how devastating this kind of slavery can be? Who hasn’t seen lives ruined by sin? Who hasn’t struggled with the power of sin in their own lives? It is, by far, the greatest foe that we as human beings will ever face.

What makes it so bad is that it’s a slavery not imposed solely from without; rather, it’s one that comes from within us. How are we freed from a slavery, a bondage, that originates in us, even in our very nature?

The answer, as we’ve seen in the above verses, comes only from the power of Jesus, who won the victory for us and who offers us the power to overcome. Through Christ, we are not only forgiven our sins, we are to be dead to them, and we are freed from them. They no longer have to dominate us. These are amazing promises, powerful promises, promises that all who profess the name of Christ must claim for themselves.

What has your own experience been with the enslaving and brutal power of sin? How can you learn to better grasp hold of the wonderful promises of freedom that have been offered to us in Jesus?

Principalities and Powers: Part 1

The Bible pictures our world as being under the dominion of evil forces that seek to control and to ultimately destroy us. The great controversy is, of course, the result of the Lord's work against these powers. The great news is that, after the Cross, victory against them is assured, even though the battle continues to rage. The conflict is dramatic, cosmic, and fierce; but the victory belongs to God, a victory in which we can share by faith.

Study the following texts: *1 John 3:8; 5:19; John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15; and Rom. 8:38, 39.* **What do these reveal to us about the reality of this battle? What great hope and promises are found in them for us?**

Many people of the twenty-first century world function on the basis of a scientific worldview alone. This means that things are examined mainly from a naturalistic perspective, the only perspective that many believe to be valid. For these people, a world populated with evil forces and dominated by demonic hostile powers is predominantly viewed as a holdover from an age of superstition and ignorance. In contrast, the Bible presents, as part of the reality of our world, an array of hostile forces comprising demonic principalities and powers. Though the biblical worldview incorporates naturalistic and scientific concepts, it certainly doesn't base all understanding of reality on them. The Bible's view of the world is large enough to encompass both natural and supernatural worldviews.

In Romans 8:38, for instance, the word translated as "principalities" is the Greek word *archai*, which could refer to civil rulers as well as to supernatural powers that attempt to exercise evil dominion over men. In Ephesians 6:12, the literal phrase "the rulers of the darkness of this age" could also be translated as "world rulers of this darkness."

"Clearly Paul is referring to personal evil spirits, who exercise a degree of authority over the world. Compare the phrase 'prince of this world,' describing Satan, in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. The personality of the devil was also clear to the revelator (Rev. 2:10; 12:10)." —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1044.

How does the reality of the great controversy reveal itself in your own life? In what ways do you sense the struggle? What's the only way to be defeated in this struggle when you have the promise of Christ's victory in your behalf?

Principalities and Powers: Part 2

As we saw, the word translated as “principalities” could refer to world rulers or supernatural powers that attempt to exercise control over human life. Another Greek word that is used in conjunction with the word *principalities* (*archai*) is the word *stoicheia*, which literally means “elements,” or “elementary substances or principle.” The contexts in which *stoicheia* is used reveal other aspects of this fallen world from which we have been redeemed by Christ’s victory on the cross.

Given the context of what we are talking about, from what other things have we been delivered through Jesus, other than literal evil powers? See Col. 2:8, 14, 20; Gal. 4:1–11, especially verses 3 and 9.

The New Testament, especially Paul’s concept of the “powers,” seems to connect spiritual beings to forces or powers that rule over human life outside of Christ. These could be political, social, traditional, even religious. The word *stoicheia*, as used in Galatians 4:3, 9, talks of the system of heathenism from which the Christians in Galatia had been delivered. It is used also in reference to aspects of the ancient Jewish legal system. In Colossians 2:8, 20, it refers metaphorically to worldly philosophical principles.

“In Isa. 24:21 the phrase ‘the kings of the earth upon the earth’ implies that ‘the high ones that are on high’ refers to Satan and the evil angels. Paul refers to Satan as ‘the prince of the power of the air’ (Eph. 2:2), and to the unseen leaders of evil as ‘the rulers of the darkness of this world’ that abide ‘in high places’ (Eph. 6:12). In 1 Cor. 15:24, 25 Paul refers to their subjugation by Christ. Isaiah foresees the time when evil angels and evil men will all suffer punishment (see Matt. 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4, 9; Rev. 20:10–15).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 198, 199.

In short, the Bible teaches us that life is ruled by a series of powers, both personal and impersonal. Without Christ, man is at the mercy of these powers, in whatever form they come. The pressures of the present moment, not to mention the fear of the future, as well as the demands of life, society, tradition, and ideology, all can exert influences that can separate a person from the Lord. But through Christ we have been acquitted not only of our sins but also from our bondage to these “powers.” We need to understand the nature of that victory and claim it as our own.

Besides the supernatural realities that exist in our world, with what other forces and influences do you struggle, forces and powers that work against you and your faith? First, identify what they are and then claim the promises you have in Jesus in order to gain victory over them.

A Murderer Revealed

Christ came into the world for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil (*Heb. 2:14*). He did this at the Cross. But if Christ has been victorious over the devil and principalities and powers, why are we still wrestling with principalities and powers? Why is the devil still able to roam about like a lion looking for prey to devour?

Study Colossians 2:15 carefully. Look at the three different verbs that Paul uses in order to describe what happened at the Cross. How do we understand what this means?

First, Christ “spoiled” (*KJV*) or “disarmed” (*NASB, NKJV*) the “powers.” The Greek word is *apekduomai*, which literally means “to strip off one’s clothes.” Here it may mean that the powers were stripped of their weapons.

What weapons? “Christ’s life of victory, culminating in Calvary, spelled the doom of the devil. Satan’s disguise was torn away. His methods of operation were laid open before the angels and the entire heavenly universe. He had exposed his true colors. . . . By His cross Jesus Christ stripped from the principalities and powers of darkness both their robe of office and authority as princes of this world, and their armor of strength in their warfare against right.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 205.

Christ “made a shew . . . openly” (*KJV*), or “made a public display” (*NASB*) of the “powers.” How were the powers exposed publicly at the Cross? What image of them became evident? See *John 8:44*.

After Christ’s death, “Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ’s brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan’s existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Book of Books,” p. 136, in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*; “Spiritualism,” pp. 394, 395, in *The Story of Redemption*; “Agency of Evil Spirits,” pp. 511–517, in *The Great Controversy*.

“A battle unseen by human eyes is being waged. The army of the Lord is on the ground, seeking to save souls. Satan and his host are also at work, trying in every possible way to deceive and destroy. . . . Day by day the battle goes on. If our eyes could be opened to see the good and evil agencies at work, there would be no trifling, no vanity, no jesting or joking. If all would put on the whole armor of God and fight manfully the battles of the Lord, victories would be gained that would cause the kingdom of darkness to tremble.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 41.

“As men seek to come into harmony with God, they will find that the offense of the cross has not ceased. Principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places are arrayed against all who yield obedience to the law of heaven. Therefore, so far from causing grief, persecution should bring joy to the disciples of Christ, for it is an evidence that they are following in the steps of their Master.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 29, 30.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at Hebrews 2:14, 15 a little more closely. Death as an agent of enslavement is clearly depicted here. Notice, too, the emphasis on our fear of death. Why do we fear death so much? How does the fear hold us, as the text says, in a kind of slavery? How should the Christian, free in Christ, view death?
- 2 For some people the whole idea of demonic forces is silly superstition; for others, this fear dominates their entire life. How, as Christians, can we strike the right balance in our understanding of the reality of these powers, and yet at the same time understand what Christ has done for us in the fight against them?
- 3 What are some examples of how evil forces control or influence various worldly powers?
- 4 How does the great-controversy worldview help us to understand the continued existence of evil, even after Christ’s victory at the cross?

The Broadcasters

A boy stood on the bank of a lake, tossing bread crumbs into the water. Small minnows and larger fish came to the surface to grab the crumbs. I thought of Ecclesiastes 11:1 which says, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again” (NIV).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s radio and television ministries are like that boy and the bread. We are “broadcasters”; we cast the Bread of Life into the waters of the world, and pray for “hungry fish.”

Augustín Martínez had been struggling for years to understand the book of Daniel. One night he dreamed that a figure dressed in white told him that soon he would understand these messages.

Augustín awoke and turned on the radio. The first words he heard were, “As it says in Daniel 7. . .” The program was *La Voz de la Esperanza*, the Spanish-language *Voice of Hope*. Augustín listened carefully and found answers to many of his questions. In time he wrote to *La Voz* and said that he, his wife, and his son had been baptized as a result of the message he had heard on the radio.

Sometimes the Bread of Life arrives just in time to save a desperate soul. Elena was a teenager when she left home to find the love she had never known from her father. What she found was heartache and AIDS. Too sick to live alone, she returned to her mother, the only person who had loved her unconditionally.

Maria’s heart broke to see her daughter wasting away. She felt she had failed the one she loved most, and she decided to end her daughter’s suffering and then kill herself. She went to the dresser and got the gun she kept there. But as she walked toward her daughter’s bedroom, the radio on the bureau turned itself on, and a voice said, “Even through your suffering and pain, Jesus understands.”

Shaken, Maria sat down and listened as the speaker’s words brought comfort to her suffering heart. At the end of the program the announcer gave a phone number. Maria dialed it immediately.

A member of *La Voz* staff visited Maria and Elena and comforted them with God’s promises of eternal love. Elena died knowing she’d see Jesus again. Maria was baptized. Maria is convinced that an angel turned on the radio so she could hear the words of life and hope.

Your mission offerings help to support Christian media around the world. We may never know this side of heaven what blessings will come from the bread we cast upon the waters through our offerings and prayers, but God knows.

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