

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 principles.” 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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ What are some examples of how evil forces control or influence various worldly powers?
- ❹ How does the great-controversy worldview help us to understand the continued existence of evil, even after Christ’s victory at the cross?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Colossians 2:15*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the completeness of the victory of Christ at the cross over not only sin but over every other power and tradition that hold humanity in bondage.

Feel: Take joy in the triumph of Christ over all the powers of evil in the world and in his or her personal life.

Do: Unite with Christ, put on His armor, and, in partnership with Him, fight for the salvation of souls.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Complete Victory

A What sophistries of Satan did Christ unmask at the cross?

B What deceptive philosophies, traditions, and social and political powers are still enslaving earth's inhabitants, and how does Christ's victory offer the power needed to overcome these forces?

II. Feel: Joy in Victory

A What assurance is possible for the believer who trusts in Christ's triumph at the cross?

B Though there are still battles to be won over evil, on what grounds can we be joyfully confident and praise God for the outcome of this cosmic war?

III. Do: The Battles of the Lord

A How do Christians unite with Christ in the final struggles with evil forces?

B Why is it important for Christ to use His friends and disciples as personal ambassadors and soldiers in the conflict here on this earth?

► **Summary:** At the cross, Christ proved victorious over evil and demonstrated that Satan's challenges to God's government were based on lies.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: In the great controversy between good and evil, the cross is a symbol of victory over sin. Though the battle wages on toward its ultimate climax, the believer experiences growth within the context of the conflict, claiming victory in Christ.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson expounds the different aspects of what Christ accomplished on the cross. While His victory over sin was complete, the Christian, through a daily struggle with sin in its many, all-encompassing effects, yet occupies the field of battle.

In this opening section it is important to begin to examine the dynamics of this battle and to look at how it is possible to have victory in living the Christian life despite the warfare involved with sin.

Opening Discussion: There are many different types of challenges and battles. Some are applicable only to the individual experience. Many people view addictive habits in terms of fighting a battle, and they communicate this with the expression “fighting a battle,” for example, against smoking. Other battles involve a corporate effort, as in the reality of warfare in defense of country and home.

Whether a battle is of an individual or corporate nature, the common goal of both is to obtain victory and win the challenge over whatever might be considered the enemy.

Looking into the general dynamics of battle, we note that there are always two opposing forces that are striving for mastery in order to win “the prize.” Included also is a battle plan or strategy, as well as the participants involved in war with each other.

A significant part of putting together a battle plan is taking inventory in order to assess what is needed in terms of tools to win the fight. These tools, along with a plan of execution, are crucial for victory.

While strategy, the right warfare equipment, and the desire for victory are important, there are also other significant components that cannot be ignored. Interviews of victorious veterans of war indicate that the roles of faith, endurance, and partnership with one another are essential to the success of winning the battle.

Scripture portrays the spiritual battle between God and evil as having begun in heaven between Lucifer and Michael. A few weeks ago, one of the lessons stated that the first created humans yielded to the power of evil, and sin entered this earth’s history. Even so, God’s Word also reveals

that a plan of battle against sin went into effect.

Today, we live on the other side of the Cross and Christ's victory over evil, sin, and death. It is at this point that we must consider the importance of spiritual tools in the battle for our salvation in this great controversy between good and evil. Victory is possible with the spiritual warfare equipment of faith, endurance, and partnership with Jesus Christ, the Victor.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 What is one Bible verse in this week's lesson that gives encouragement to the believer in relationship to the battle against evil?
- 2 What is the significance of Christ's victory on the cross, and what implications does this have for our daily life?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The historical context of the letter of Paul to the Romans reveals Paul's pastoral heart and also his teaching skill when striving to address and instruct the new church converts in their spiritual understanding of what it meant to live a new life in Christ. This instruction is specifically the theme of Romans 6. For Step 2, please read each section of this chapter, discussing the different illustrations that Paul uses when addressing how to grow and live the Christian life in view of Christ's victory on the cross.

I. Baptism, Death, and Life (*Read Romans 6:1–11 with your class.*)

Romans 6 begins with Paul's strong reaction to the wrong idea that it seems had been suggested by some in the early Roman congregation. The implication was that if grace was extended all the more each time one sinned, then one should sin in order to have this grace abounding more. Paul uses the demonstration of baptism to refute this wrong conclusion and also to illustrate what a new life in Christ should look like.

In the early church, baptism was evidence of a personal confession of faith and also of the leaving behind of one's former life that he or she had been living without Christ.

Paul uses the spiritual experience in the life of the new convert as a means to discuss more deeply how to think through the before- and after-conversion

lifestyle and the implications that this reflection has for the new believer in Christ.

Paul explains that baptism is a burying of everything that had to do with a former life. The action of baptism joins a believer with Christ. Just as Christ was resurrected from the dead “to the glory of the Father,” so now in baptism a burial of the old has taken place, and there is, as in resurrection, a newness of life.

Verse 11 puts forward the new attitude and way in which one needs to think about a new lifestyle: “In the same way look upon yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin but alive and sensitive to the call of God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (*Phillips*).

Consider This: What is wrong with the skewed idea that we should sin more in order to receive more grace? What does it mean to be dead to sin and alive in Christ? How do we enact this truth through baptism?

II. Weapons, Tools, and Instruments (*Read Romans 6:12–14 with your class.*)

Have different members of your class read Romans 6:12–14 from different Bible translations (if available). Notice the different words that are used in verse 13 for “weapon of wickedness” and “weapon of righteousness.” *The Living Bible* translation presents a good reading of this passage: “Do not let sin control your puny body any longer; do not give in to its sinful desires. Do not let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God—every part of you—for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes. Sin need never again be your master, for now you are no longer tied to the law where sin enslaves you, but you are free under God’s favor and mercy” (*vss. 12–14*).

Discussion Question: How does the difference in wording between instrument, tool, weapon, or member contribute a new insight into how much of our life we are to give to God and how it should be lived?

III. Slaves of God (*Read Romans 6:15–23 with your class.*)

Paul uses a strong and graphic illustration in his teaching of what it means to live a new life in Christ. In its historical context, the illustration shows that in Paul’s time and location, as in many other parts of the world, to be a slave meant that one did not own any part of one’s life. All attention was directed to the master in terms of service and time. A slave also did not have any rights; rather, he or she was viewed as a possession in service to the master.

Of interest in this text is verse 16, “You belong to the power which you choose to obey, whether you choose sin, whose reward is death, or God, obedience to whom means the reward of righteousness” (*Phillips*). In other words, referring

back to baptism, those who choose to follow Jesus do so freely, choosing a new Master and new relationship of slavery and service to the Master.

Notice the vast difference in pay scale between serving sin and becoming slaves of righteousness. *The Living Bible* version expresses well this consideration: “In those days when you were slaves of sin you didn’t bother much with goodness. And what was the result? Evidently not good, since you are ashamed now even to think about those things you used to do, for all of them end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and are slaves of God, and his benefits to you include holiness and everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (*vss. 21–23*).

Discussion: Ask class members to define in their own words the difference between the wages of service to sin and the “free gift” from the Master.

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Divide your class members into small groups (ideally of 3–5 participants each).

Activity: Have your small groups design for a target group a battle plan for living a new, vibrant, and growing life in Christ; for example, the target group could be young adults, new church members, grandparents, et cetera.

Make sure in light of this week’s lesson that you consider the enemy also in terms of principalities and powers, and highlight the means of obtaining victory in Christ.

Regroup once this first part of the activity is accomplished and then ask one member of each small group to share his or her group’s battle plan with the group at large.

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Writing supplies needed: paper or note cards and writing utensils. Is there a Sabbath School member missing from your group? Have your class members all write words of encouragement on a card or paper and either give or mail their notes to that member immediately. (Alternately, to perform this exercise without supplies, and in instances where it is more preferable or convenient to do so, visit, e-mail, or phone him or her.) Practice being an “instrument” of righteousness today.