

Victory Over Evil Forces



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Eph. 1:18–22, Rom. 8:26–39, James 4:7, 1 Pet. 5:6–10, Luke 10:1–20, Acts 5:12–16.*

Memory Text: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (*Romans 8:37, NKJV*).

Key Thought: In Christ, we have victory over all forces that would oppress us.

In some parts of the world, religion is basically a source of power that may be seen as nothing but a way to help one meet the challenges of daily living. The Christian notion of salvation from sin, for example, is foreign to many traditional religions. In these places, Christianity risks being seen mainly as a means to help solve the problems of everyday life.

Though there are, of course, many practical advantages to a Christian’s lifestyle, we must always remember that Christianity has an “otherworldly” outlook. In other words, Christianity sees another dimension of reality beyond the material world. Both realms are important, and both host forces that are at cross purposes with each other. How thankful we can be that we are promised victory.

Again, we stress that the overarching narrative of the great controversy between Christ and Satan needs to form the background template for our understanding of the world and our place within it as Christians. In the midst of this conflict, Christianity does not abandon its adherents to the mercy of the opposing forces. On the contrary, in Christ we have the promise of victory over those forces.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 10.*

A Stage Set for Our Victory

The Christian would have no hope of victory over the forces of evil unless the stage was set for it. In last week's study it became clear that Christ, through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, gained victory over all sorts of evil and antigodly "powers." In a very real sense, the unmasking and disarming of these "powers" have placed a limit on them. The fact that the "powers" have been brought under subjection sets the stage for the victory of the Christian.

Study Ephesians 1:18–22. Paul prays for the enlightening of the eyes of the Christians in Ephesus. According to Paul, what did Christ accomplish for us? How do we understand these words in the context of the great controversy? What is promised to us here? How do we make these promises real in our own experience?

Paul is praying that a new and deep illumination will accompany the Christian. When this has happened, their lives will be filled with Christian hope. They will know their privileges as God's heirs, and they will know by experience the power of God in their lives, a power that is of the same magnitude as that which raised Jesus from the dead.

Notice Ephesians 1:20–22 in particular. What can we claim from these promises for ourselves and our struggles with forces stronger than we are?

As a consequence of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, all things, including principalities and powers, function in subjection to Him. The stage is truly set for the possibility of our individual victories over all that would spiritually oppress us.

Read the verses for today. What can you take from them that you can apply to whatever struggles you are facing at the moment? Think about what is being said in them and what is promised to us in Christ. How, in your own experience, can this message go from being mere theology to reality?

Hope of Victory

Not only is the stage set for the possibility of the Christian's victory over evil forces, but the Bible explicitly gives us the hope of victory over them.

Study Romans 8:26–39. What point is Paul trying to make here? What reasons does Paul give for the Christian to look confidently to the future? Look at all the wonderful promises and words of encouragement found in these verses. Again, how can we take them beyond theology, beyond something that sounds nice, and live according to the clear teachings of the Word of God that are presented here?

Romans 8:29, 30 has been a battleground for discussions on predestination. But the passage really occurs in the context of a great promise. Paul gives at least two solid reasons for the Christian to be confident in the Lord. First, the Spirit helps us in our trials and “groanings.” Second, according to God's eternal purpose, all things, including trials, contribute to the Christian's ultimate welfare (no matter how hard that might be to see at this present time). Trusting God in difficulties is, indeed, a crucial component of what it means to live by faith and not by sight.

Verses 29 and 30 are Paul's way of justifying the confidence expressed in verse 28. In these verses he shows how God's purpose for those who love Him is developed, a purpose that includes all the processes of salvation.

How does Paul's argument for boosting the confidence of the Christian reach a pinnacle in verses 31–34? Look especially at verse 31. In the context of the great controversy, what can we take from this verse for ourselves?

Romans 8:35–39 gives an array of entities over which the Christian can be victorious. Notice that “principalities and powers” are included in the list. The sheer inclusiveness of Paul's list points out that there is nothing in the universe over which the Christian cannot be victorious, thanks to Jesus.

Christians Versus the Devil

Read James 4:7. What clear promise is given to the one who stands against the devil? How do we stand against a force so much more powerful than we are, in and of ourselves? See also Deut. 4:4.

The Christian is not a helpless victim, at the mercy of the devil. (Can you see here, too, why it's so important to understand the literal reality of Satan and the fallen angels?) But the Christian is not so much called upon to rise in opposition to the devil as to take a stand against him. The word translated as "resist" is the Greek *anthistemi*, which means "taking a stand against something." It is an attitude the Christian takes that causes the devil to flee. That attitude has to be one of complete surrender to Jesus, who alone has the power to cause the devil to flee from us.

Study 1 Peter 5:6–10. What promise is given to the Christian in the face of an enemy who is described as a "roaring lion" seeking someone to devour? How do these verses help us to understand what James wrote? See also Eph. 4:27 and 6:11.

Peter wrote these words to admonish Christians who were suffering persecution. Obviously he knew that lurking behind the persecution his readers were suffering was the archenemy, Satan. The apostle admonished his readers to resist the devil. Here Peter uses the word *anthistemi*, as James did, but he adds the modifier *stereo*i ("hard" or "firm"). Thus, he suggests that the devil may flee from those who present a solid, rock-like front against his attacks. A cowardly attitude will not suffice. Still, Peter knows that in spite of a strong stand, suffering may endure for a while yet; but God Himself will perfect (mend), establish, strengthen, and settle the Christian (*1 Pet. 5:10*).

Even with all the promises given here, we are not promised freedom from suffering, are we? What Christian doesn't know the reality of suffering? As humans, we seem destined in this world to suffer. What crucial difference should our faith make for us amid sorrows and pain?

Examples of Victory

So far we have been shown by the Bible the hope and promises of victory that the Christian may have. Actually beyond these, we have real examples of Christian victories over evil forces recorded in the Bible. We begin with the example of the ministry of the early disciples whom Jesus sent out.

Read Matthew 10:1–8; Mark 6:7, 12, 13; Luke 9:1, 2; Luke 10:1–20. **Look at what these people were commissioned to do. How are these texts to be understood in the context of the great controversy? Also, what do these texts say today to us, the ones who are called to preach to the world about Jesus?**

It is quite interesting that as Jesus sent the Twelve out to proclaim the gospel of the coming of God’s kingdom, He deemed it important to give them power over demons and unclean spirits. This is not surprising, because proper preaching of the gospel necessarily entails the unmasking of such powers. The manifestation of the “powers” was to be expected as the gospel would be proclaimed; hence, the need to give the Twelve power over them. Surely, the evil forces manifested themselves as the Twelve went about preaching, and, just as surely, many demons and evil forces were cast out.

As far as can be seen from the records, Jesus did not, in specific terms, commission the Seventy to cast out demons (*Luke 10:9*). Yet, this is the aspect of the mission that seems to have excited the Seventy the most (*Luke 10:17*). With joy the Seventy reported that as they went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, demons were brought into subjection to them. Of course, they understood that it was the power of Jesus working through them that made this possible.

Though much can be discussed and debated about these texts and the way in which they should be understood today, the important point is that, as Christians who have been called to proclaim the gospel to the world, we have, through Christ, the power to do it.

Read Luke 10:20. What important point should we take for ourselves from Jesus’ words here? How does His response show us what should be important in our lives? How can we make sure that we keep this correct emphasis?

Examples of Victory (Book of Acts)

The examples of victories over demonic forces that we looked at in yesterday’s lesson happened in the days of our Lord on the earth. But the victories were by no means restricted to that period. In the book of Acts we find the continuing victories of Jesus’ followers over demonic forces.

Of course, this shouldn’t be surprising, not with all the promises that Jesus left to His followers about the Holy Spirit being with them when He Himself left (*see, for example, John 14:16*).

At the same time, too, as we so well know, the great controversy between Christ and Satan, though settled finally at the cross, is to rage until the end of time. Thus, Christ’s followers, even after He left, were to be engaged in the conflict, especially as they sought to fulfill the gospel commission.

Read the following examples of some of these victories over evil forces. What lesson can we learn from them in our present context of outreach and witness?

Acts 5:12–16 _____

Acts 3:1–11 _____

Acts 16:16–18 _____

Acts 16:16–18 presents an unusual case. When the slave girl mentioned “the Most High God,” her words expressed a great truth. Paul, though, would have none of it. He could see what was really going on. The supernatural powers that she had manifested, which were making money for her masters, were not of the Lord, and Paul knew it. When she cried out about these men being “servants of the Most High God” (*NKJV*), she was not talking about the true God but, most likely, about a Canaanite god who was also called *Elyon* (Most High). Notice how easily, merely through the use of certain common terms, error could have greatly compromised the truth.

Look again at Acts 5:12–16 and the amazing part about the people hoping that “at least the shadow of Peter” (*NKJV*) might touch them. What warnings should that have for any Christian who is working for the Lord, especially when his or her work is deemed “successful”?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Appropriating the Righteousness of Christ,” p. 93, in *Faith and Works*; “Science and Revelation,” p. 310, in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God, and by the apostle He says to us, ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.’ James 4:7, 8. We cannot save ourselves from the tempter’s power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but ‘the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.’ Prov. 18:10. Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 130, 131.

“The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper.

“There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast out the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 490, 493.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Take some of the examples from this week that show the victories revealed in the Bible. In what ways do we see similar things happening today? What can we do, if anything, to see more of them?
- ❷ What does it mean to “draw nigh unto God,” as Ellen G. White quoted above? How do we do that? Discuss in class what it means, how we do it, and what happens when we do.
- ❸ Imagine that you are Peter, and people want to merely be touched by your shadow. Think about what that could do to you spiritually. What’s your only safety in a situation like that?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Romans 8:37*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the basis on which the followers of Christ may experience victory over the evil one.

Feel: Acknowledge the power of Christ available to the weakest soul who, through repentance and faith, claims His protection and strength.

Do: Submit to God, draw near to Him, and stand in His strength, resisting Satan's wiles.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Assurance of Victory

A What biblical examples demonstrate how followers of Christ have been victorious over the devil?

B How may Christians draw on the promises of God for power and victory in times of temptation?

II. Feel: Perfect Hope

A How was Christ victorious over Satan? In like manner, how may Christ's followers utilize the same means in order to attain victory?

B How may the children of God be confident in Christ's ability to offer every power they need to resist the evil one? What hope and joy does this assurance provide?

III. Do: Stand Like a Rock

A What must Christians do in order to meet the devil's attacks?

B Who should be the main focus of attention when trouble surrounds the child of God?

C What promises for power and victory may be claimed daily?

► **Summary:** Through submission to God and faith in the Father, Christ gained victory over Satan. In the same way, as His followers seek God's power to overcome temptation through submission to God's will and faith in His Word, even the weakest soul will be victorious.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christ's death on the cross offers the hope of a life reconciled to God while also extending victory to the believer over the forces of evil.

Just for Teachers: This week's study reflects on the principalities and powers of evil in relationship to the promises and biblical examples of victory. The latter are testimony to the fact that, with the power of Jesus Christ, victory over the forces of evil is possible.

Your goal in Step 1 is to encourage class members to think more deeply about the spiritual victories that have already been won in their lives. This is a time to gather hope and encouragement in recalling God's work and His fulfilled promises on their behalf.

You will need a chalkboard or writing board for this section that will be visible to all your class members. (Alternately, if a chalkboard is not available, record the opening activity on a piece of paper or simply discuss it with the class.)

Opening Activity: Draw a line down the middle of your chalkboard or writing board. At the top of the left column write the words "Principalities and Powers" and on the right column write the word "Victories."

Now have your class members think back to their pre-conversion or pre-baptism lives. What were they spiritually struggling against? Make a list of these struggles under the column "Principalities and Powers."

At this point, ask your class members to recall the power of God in their lives and the ways this power was evidenced in victory. Write their responses under the column "Victories."

Thought Question: How do my responses influence my hope for victory over evil forces today?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: No one suffered more than Jesus. Suffering, as part of living the Christian life, is best understood in the context of the lives of biblical characters, such as Christ and Paul, who suffered persecution, hardship, and adversity while living out their faith.

Scripture makes known from Genesis to Revelation the consequence of sin and the open attack upon God’s people by instruments of wickedness. Even so, many times we forget and question our difficult circumstances; therefore, we are in constant need of being reminded through the promises in Scripture that living victoriously amid suffering is possible in Christ.

The goal of this section is to reflect more deeply on the topics of suffering and hardship in the life of the believing follower of Christ, as well as to reflect on the hope and victory that are made possible through faith.

Please read through all of the Scripture passages and encourage your class members to read from different versions of the Bible for added insight and meaning into the text.

I. Living and Suffering for Christ (*Read 1 Peter 4:12–19, 5:6–11 with your class.*)

In the first text, 1 Peter 4:12–19, the apostle Peter remarks in verses 12 and 13, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (*NIV*).

Writing in apostolic times, Peter the disciple knew firsthand that to identify with Jesus would naturally result in persecution and suffering. For those brothers and sisters in Christ living currently in geographic locations and conditions where very little persecution and trial occur as a result of being a follower of Christ, it is a surprise when unexpected adversity and hardship occur in their lives.

Notice carefully Peter’s clarification and commentary (*1 Pet. 5:8–11*) on the topic of suffering, as paraphrased in *The Living Bible*: “Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart. Stand firm when he attacks. Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world are going through these sufferings too” (*vss. 8, 9*).

Suffering, therefore, is to be an expected occurrence in the life of Christians, given their common enemy. However, equally important is the promise of victory that Peter shares with the followers of Christ in verses 10 and 11: “After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you his eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever. To him be all power over all things, forever and ever. Amen” (*TLB*).

Please turn your attention now to 1 Peter 5:6, 7. Note Peter’s words that offer great comfort and guidance during times of trial and affliction: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due

time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (*NIV*).

Consider This: Have your class members paraphrase 1 Peter 5:6, 7. What does this verse tell us about God?

II. Keeping Eternity in View (*Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–17 with your class.*)

The apostle Paul is an exceptional example of suffering for Christ, and is someone who endures many forms of hardship; as such, he is an authoritative voice on the subjects of suffering, faith, and victory in Christ.

Notice carefully the contrasts he draws forth in verses 8 and 9. He speaks of being afflicted in every way, but not crushed; intensely perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not feeling forsaken by God; struck down, but not destroyed.

Note the word *always* in verse 10. Reflecting on this word gives evidence that Paul endured this kind of suffering as a daily, usual experience in the course of his life and ministry. Observe in verses 10 and 11 how the apostle Paul keeps in view the life and death of Jesus in relationship to his own spiritual experience.

How is Paul able to endure and live through such intense, constant suffering? Read again verses 13 and 14. “But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” (*NRSV*).

Paul had eyes of faith that viewed life from a broad eternal perspective and not from a short-term momentary outlook. This spiritual lens gave Paul an attitude of generosity, as expressed in verse 15, “Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (*NRSV*).

It is in verses 16–18 that Paul displays faith in abundant measure and places suffering in its rightful place. “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (*NRSV*).

Therefore, Paul bears witness to the importance of focusing our attention on eternal realities. Consequently, he shows us how to place actual-present circumstances, suffering, and afflictions within their proper context in view of “the eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”

Consider This: How did Paul keep from losing heart in the face of his continuous daily struggles? How can keeping in mind the life and death of Jesus help us to endure affliction on our spiritual journey?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This exercise will provide opportunity to work with the themes of opposing power, God’s power, suffering, and victory. Please allow enough time to read through the Scripture narrative and work through the responses.

You will need paper and writing utensils for each class member. You will also need a chalkboard or writing board that may be viewed by your class members. Make four columns and write the following headings in each column:

WHO (list the persons in the story)

WHAT they did

HOW they responded verbally

WHAT implications do you find for your life in view of suffering and victory?

(Alternately, if you do not have the supplies available, simply divide the class into groups and discuss their responses to the questions listed above.)

Activity: Divide your class members into groups of 3–5 persons (ideally). Have the small group members take turns reading through Acts 5:12–42. Then have them write down their responses to the questions listed on your writing board.

When the groups have finished working through this passage, have them come together again to share their responses.

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: It is important to review and evaluate what we have learned by creatively expressing the spiritual insights that have touched our hearts and lives. It is worthwhile to acknowledge how far-reaching the examples and words of the individuals portrayed in Scripture are—how they continue to inspire, encourage, and contribute to our spiritual growth and faith. This understanding is necessary in order to live a life of victory in Christ.

Activity: Team up your class members into pairs and have them create and write down (if supplies are available) an imaginary conversation with Peter and the apostles. Have them begin this conversation with the words: “Peter and apostles, today you have strengthened my faith by . . .”