



**Title: A Battle Rages**

**Theme: Uncovering the Root of Our Failures**

**Series: Grasping Our Authority in Christ**

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

### **A holy fear of the wicked heart of mankind is what is needed in the lives of Christians**

*A preacher of salvation may yet miss all that the Lord has for him.* He may tell others all the doctrines of God, yet be unable to live out the victorious life promised in Christ Jesus. To prevent this from happening, Paul took whatever measures necessary to subdue the flesh, protect himself from the world’s influence and reject the lies of the devil, all for the sake of his Lord, Jesus Christ.

A holy fear of the wicked heart of mankind is what is needed in the lives of Christians. Christians who grasp their authority in Christ have a fear of themselves and do not hold the grace of God in contempt. (Romans 2:4) Mature Christians who feed on the meat of God’s Word know that the Lord had disciplined in the past, (1 Corinthians 10:6-10) He disciplines in the present, (1 Corinthians 11:30-32) and He is able to discipline in the immediate future. (1 Corinthians 5:5)

Christians who grasp their authority in Christ are enabled to say in their work with the Lord, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

*Just what prevents the unrepentant from coming to Christ and the child of God from enjoying God’s perfect will?*

Although the Apostle Paul knew that nothing can separate him from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39) and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1) he was very conscious of the constant battle against sin. (Romans 7:21-24) Christians who walk in the authority of Christ live in confidence of God’s sovereign grace because they are conscious of their battle against sin.

*I would propose to you that God cannot and will not give more authority or instruction to the child of God until he obeys the ones that the Holy Spirit has already revealed to him.* The Apostle Paul knew the danger of this for he used the phrase, "I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." The word disqualified (*adokimos*) means to be unapproved. The Holy Spirit of Christ moved the Apostle Paul to write today's key text, therefore, the children of God should take to heart the danger of becoming unapproved for the reward God desires to give His obedient servants.

The Holy Spirit moved Paul to write, "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." (1 Corinthians 10:1-6)

The Christian life is a life of continued repentance, humiliation for and mortification of sin. Christians who walk in continued faith have thankfulness for Christ's redeeming blood and have a joyful expectation of Holy Spirit empowerment to live a life beyond mediocrities.

### **Get the right diagnoses of our condition**

*The first step to living in the authority of Christ is to get the right diagnoses of our condition.* Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct according to what his deeds deserve." Two other wonderful translations say the heart is desperately sick.

These passages of Scripture expose the sinfulness of man's heart, and the divine inspection for which mankind gets his just rewards or chastisements. It is easy to make others think that we trust in God. Too often church attendees can speak the Christian language, even go through the motions of Christian living, yet in their hearts there is that root of rebellion that is always resisting, arguing and grumbling against the Holy Spirit of Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes about this in Romans 7:21-23, "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

Christians who grasp their authority in Christ allow the Holy Spirit to do a cleansing within their spiritual hearts. This cleansing prevents them from becoming like the little boy who wanted to hang on to his rebellion even though he was doing the right actions.

Vance Havner tells the story of a father who had a little boy who loved his rebellion more than the joy of heartfelt obedience. “On the way to the store the father had to keep telling his son to sit down in the car and buckle the seat belt. But the little boy just kept standing up in the seat.

The father finally became angry, and told the little boy, ‘You’d better sit down and buckle your seat belt!’ After the third time of being told, the little boy understood that he if did not sit down and buckle his seat belt, there would be serious consequences. So the little boy slipped down in the seat and buckled up his seatbelt. While sitting in the seat all buckled up the little boy said, ‘Daddy, I am sitting down on the outside, but on the inside I am standing up.’” (The Best of Vance Havner / The tale of the Tardy Oxcart, Swindoll) It is that inside that needs to be dealt with before the child of God can enjoy the authority of Christ in overcoming sin.

All Christians who live under the Lordship of Christ have the spiritual maturity to say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23)

### **Recognizing when you are walking in rebellion**

*A truthful diagnosis of the human heart opens the door to the next step of living in the authority of Christ, recognizing when you are walking in rebellion.* The writer of the Book of Hebrews writes much about this, “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried Me and for forty years saw what I did. ...Their hearts are always going astray... See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:7-12)

This charge is from the Holy Spirit Himself, and it is directed to every generation of Christians. The charge is of critical importance because there is great danger in not being aware of our rebellious acts toward the Lord. During Israel’s wandering they distrusted God’s care, murmured against His chosen leaders and regretted their leaving Egypt.

Those in rebellion today withhold their tithes and offerings from the Lord. They refuse to exercise their spiritual gifts for the good of others or to make time for the things of God. These rebels grumble against church leadership, they keep looking back to those places where they were in bondage, thinking that it was better there than where the Lord has them right now.

Those who attend church make a serious mistake when they think that just exposing themselves to the things of God, the preaching and teaching of God's Word, the listening to or singing of Christian music will enable them to have an intimate relationship with the Lord. As important and valuable as these things are they will have little effect until the root of the problem, rebellion is dwelt with by surrendering to the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Adrian Rogers wrote, "We are guilty of rebellion every time we choose to believe a different idea about the way things should be done than the way God has instructed us in His written Word." Let the Holy Spirit place this truth within your spiritual heart. Whenever you make a decision or live out an action without meditating upon and surrendering to the Word of God, you have chosen to enjoy the flesh, the World, or the lie of the devil over Holy Spirit leading.

Those who grasp their authority in Christ understand the heart of Isaiah when he prayed, "Yet, they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit..." (Isaiah 63:10) Grieving the Holy Spirit leaves us in the hands of ourselves and that is the worse thing the Lord can do to us. (Romans 1:18-32)

In a book titled, "Can Man Live without God," Ravi Zacharias writes about a conversation between Malcolm Muggeridge and Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, who was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922 until his death on March 5, 1953.

Bible teacher Ravi Zacharias writes, "According to Svetlana, as Stalin lay dying, plagued with terrifying hallucinations, he suddenly sat halfway up in bed, clenched his fist toward the heavens once more, then fell back upon his pillow, and was dead.

The incredible irony of his whole life is that at one time Josef Stalin had been a seminary student, preparing for the ministry. Coming of Nietzschean age, he made a decisive break from his belief in God. This dramatic and complete reversal of conviction that resulted in his hatred for all religion is why Lenin had earlier chosen Stalin and positioned him in authority—a choice Lenin too late regretted.

The name Stalin, which means "steel," was not his real name, but was given to him by his contemporaries who fell under the steel-like determination of his will. And as Stalin lay dying, his one last gesture was a clenched fist toward God, his heart as cold and hard as steel. (Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God*, Word Publication, Dallas: 1994), p. 26.

Stalin had the great opportunity to study the Word of God, but chose to harden his heart and live a life of rebellion toward his Creator.

It takes more than just knowledge of God's Word, enjoyment of Christian music and Christian fellowship. There must be a mortification of this rebellion that so

often rises up in the heart of mankind before a person can grasp their authority in Christ. The exhortation from the Holy Spirit at this moment is, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:7-12)

### **Christians who grasp their authority in Christ make Biblical checks**

*The work of the Holy Spirit is to continually work on the spiritual heart of mankind.* (John 16:8) Christians who grasp their authority in Christ make Biblical checks to make sure they are overcoming that root of rebellion which in truth is contempt of God. Psalm 107:11 says, "...for they rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High." Rebellion puts a person into both physical and spiritual bondage.

Another word used to describe rebellion is "apostasy." (The New International Dictionary of the Bible) The heart attitude that leads to protecting a person from living a life of rebellion is to have a reverent fear of Jeremiah 2:19, "Your own wickedness will correct you, And your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter..." The New Testament gives warnings against apostasy because it is a continual danger to the church of Christ. (The New Bible Dictionary, 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; Hebrews 3:12; 2 Peter 3:17)

"Apostasy" (*apostasía*) is a technical term for revolt or defect and in the Word of God always relates to rebellion against God. (The New Bible Dictionary)

The best way of seeing the negative results of rebellion is to take a Scriptural look into the lives of people used by God who chose a lifelong walk in rebellion.

The Bible is very clear on the heart of King Saul. Saul's explicit introduction is in 1 Samuel 9:1-2. There is an unsettling truth, that which was missing in Saul's life in the Biblical introduction of Saul who became the king of Israel. God enabled Saul to become king because the people of God rejected Him as their King, (1 Samuel 8:6-8) thus, changing Israel's government from a Theocracy to human kingly government.

The Bible says Kish "had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites – a head taller than any of the others. (1 Samuel 9:2) Please observe how this Biblical account has a positive tone and this first description of Saul focuses exclusively on external qualities. After looking at the whole council of Scripture, in regard to Saul, we see that although Saul was a superb physical specimen, he was lacking in the spiritual qualities necessary to being a man of God after the Lord's own heart. (Who's Who in the Bible)

To help understand how a rebellious heart destroys God's plan for us, we need to get a Biblical character analysis of Saul, beginning with how Saul came to

know the hand of the Lord upon his life. 1 Samuel 9-10 says a lot about the small beginnings of King Saul's life and about his exposure to the revealing hand of God.

In his early years Saul was diligent and not afraid of hard work. (1 Samuel 9 3-4) He was determined to accomplish his earthly father's will and at the same time had consideration about his father's feelings. (1 Samuel 9:5)

People are in great error when they think that someone has a right heart before the Lord just because they are diligent in their labors and considerate of other people's feelings. Positive actions can be an excellent cover-up for a heart that is not fully surrendered to the will of God. Hard diligent workers can very easily get ahead of the Lord and cause everyone connected with their lives major problems.

Saul was pointed in the right direction to grasp and enjoy the authority that God was to give him. When Saul told the servant, who was sent with him to look for his father's donkeys that they should "go back" home, the servant said. "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected... Lets go there..." (1 Samuel 9:6)

That fact is, all may find the right direction for enjoying their authority in Christ by being directed to a person who can explain to them the things of God, someone who knows God's Word. However, that is not a sign that a person has gotten victory over rebellion or will ever enjoy the abundant life promised in Christ. It shows the graciousness of God and nothing more.

Saul was the type of person who knows the value of and the correctness in making sure a man of God is properly cared for. Saul's response to his servant was, "...if we go, what can we give the man... We have no gift for the man of God."

There are many who know the blessings that come with taking care of a Bible teacher's needs. There are even those who have enough fear of the Lord to know that the work of God should receive proper compensation. Yet that is not a sign that such a person is surrendered to the will of God in their life.

Saul experienced the sovereignty of God as he was guided to that place where he could receive Godly direction. As Saul and his servant made their way into Ramah, Samuel's hometown, (1 Samuel 7:17) they were met by some maidservants who gave directions for finding the man of God. (1 Samuel 9:11) Saul walked right up to Samuel as Samuel was making his way to a place of worship. (1 Samuel 9:12-14) Saul had gone to the place of worship, and enjoyed fellowship with Samuel. He received Divine direction and even his anointing, a sign that God's hand would be upon him. (1 Samuel 9: 19 – 10:8)

The Lord in His loving grace will make the way for all who are seeking the things and the will of God to get to that place of worship. He will make every opportunity for them to have fellowship with His people and receive His Divine guidance. The Lord's guidance comes through Christian parents and family members, those who are an active part of the Body of Christ, and Christians who sacrificially exercise their Spiritual gifts. However, this is not a sign that they have surrendered their rebellious heart to God's perfect will.

Saul was a man who knew the anointing of God upon his life. 1 Samuel 10:9-10 says, "As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying." Another place in Scripture we read, "...the Spirit of God came upon him in power..." (1 Samuel 11:6)

The truth to catch is, God changed Saul's inner heart, meaning Saul had been given a new purpose for living. A new fire kindled in his heart. He went from seeking donkeys to becoming God's armor bearer in dealing with the Philistine. His focus was now upon making sure laws were passed that protected Israel, administering justice and providing public safety. His heart moved from caring for livestock, to becoming what we would call a statesman, a general, a prince with power, whom God called into service. (Matthew Henry Commentary; Commentary of the Old Testament; The Pulpit Commentary)

Saul even prophesied (*naba*), meaning to give divine inspiration, to give religious instruction or to share how the Lord comes to His people. (The Complete Word Study of the Old Testament; Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition)

There are many who have God's anointing upon their lives and who the Lord uses to proclaim Biblical truths. They do great things for the Lord and are seen in powerful places of spiritual and earthly leadership. However, this is not a sign that such people have surrendered their rebellious heart to the Lord. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23) This is one of those sobering passages of Scripture that the Holy Spirit uses to keep Christians walking in a true reverent fear of the Lord.

Matthew Henry writes, "Note, a man may be a preacher, may have gifts for the ministry, and an external call to it, and perhaps some success in it, and yet be a wicked man; he may be used to [give truths that lead] others to heaven and come short himself... Let us take heed of resting in external privileges and performances, lest we deceive ourselves, and perish eternally..." (Matthew Commentary) Obedience is an important qualification of proving to oneself that he is in the right relationship with the Lord. (The New American Commentary) William Barclay wrote "There is only one way in which a man's sincerity can be proven, and that proof is obedience to the Lord's will."

God's Word is very clear about Saul. 1 Samuel 15:11, "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from Me and has not carried out my instructions." A primary indicator of Saul's unsuitability was his repeated failure to obey the Word of the Lord as issued by Samuel.

Just how did Saul turn away from the Lord and what were the consequences of His rebellion? When things looked bad, Saul took matters into his own hands, choosing his own way of seeking favor with God. (1 Samuel 13:12) Listen to Samuel's rebuke, "What have you done?..." Catch Saul's justification, "When I saw that the men were scattering... I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor. So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.'

'You acted foolishly,' Samuel said. 'You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, He would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people, because you have not kept the LORD's command.'" (1 Samuel 13: 11-14)

Then Saul's rebellion takes him into a deeper evil in the eyes of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 15 we read of Saul being sent out on a mission for the Lord. He was given clear instructions on what God wanted him to do. (1 Samuel 15:1 -3) The Bible says Saul and His army were "unwilling to destroy completely" everything while doing their God ordained mission. After the Lord gave Saul and his army victory, Saul set up a monument in his own honor. (1 Samuel 15:12) Saul was given specific instruction from God through the prophet Samuel. 1 Samuel 15:2 has those instructions. "Do not spare them, put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

We convince ourselves that rebellion is hard core disobedience. For example, I know that murder is wrong, but I am going to do it anyway. We see only acts of direct defiance as being rebellion. These thoughts are not new and I am sure that Saul had the same kind of thinking. He did not see his actions as God did and neither do most people today.

Listen carefully to this Biblical discourse between the Prophet Samuel and the poor spiritual example, King Saul. “‘Stop!’ Samuel said to Saul. ‘Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.’

‘Tell me,’ Saul replied.

Samuel said, ‘Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And He sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.’ ‘Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?’

Take note of how blinding rebellion is, “‘But I did obey the LORD,’ Saul said. ‘I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.’

But Samuel replied: ‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king.’”

Rebellion is feeling that your way is better and disregarding the Word of the Lord as being final authority. How often have the religious neglected the council of God’s Word and chosen their own ideas, repeating spiritual slogans like, “After all we are all Christians.” Church attendees believe the Lord will overlook His clear Biblical instructions and will be satisfied with their religious acts which are all birthed from their own desires.

You would think that Samuel’s rebuke would have caused Saul to be sick of his rebellious heart, but he goes from bad to worse. In 1 Samuel chapter 28 we read of the Prophet Samuel being dead and Saul showing forth an outwardly righteous appearance by expelling the mediums and spiritists from the land. (1 Samuel 28:3) When trouble comes, Saul’s real heart comes to light again.

When Saul sees the Philistine army, he becomes afraid, terror fills His heart. (1 Samuel 28:5) Saul, “‘Inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, ‘Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.’” (1 Samuel 28:6)

Saul returns to trusting in man and using his own way of discerning spiritual things and through this sin he finds that in less than twenty-four hours he and his sons will be physically dead as Samuel was. (1 Samuel 28:19)

In the end, the kingdom of Israel was taken from Saul and his descendants, Saul and his sons died in the battle with the Philistines. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 says, “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the Word of the Lord

and even consulted a medium for guidance and did not inquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David, son of Jesse.”

“Did not inquire (*saa*) of the Lord” has a meaning of King Saul not inquiring of the Lord in the spirit of humble repentance, nor did he possess the confident belief that is seen in a true heart that is seeking God. (The New Bible Commentary; A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old Testament; Commentary of the Old Testament; The Pulpit Commentary)

Notice, the Word of the Lord was that Saul’s family kingship would be turned over to David’s family line. God had chosen both men for the same commission with the same anointing. Both men had slipped into horrible sin, yet Saul failed miserably and David finished well. Both 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22 have this expression, “a man after God’s own heart.” The reason for Saul’s failure and David’s success is found in this expression, “surrender of the will.”

The person who is dedicated to his own will is the person who seeks to justify his actions. Because self-justification is a priority, either arising from a personal sense of arrogance or a personal sense of personal insecurity, this person is reluctant to repent because he is reluctant to accept responsibility for personal behavior.

The person whose priority is dedication to God’s will for him has accepted the truth about himself.

The Christian who grasps his authority in Christ says, "Compared to God, I am nothing. Left to myself, I make poor choices. In my life, there is never a question about Who is in charge, the Lord Jesus Christ is. Even if I make a horrible, embarrassing choice, I know I want God in control of my life. Whatever is necessary for me to reestablish relationship with God, it must happen, and quickly!" This Christian is continually ready to repent (redirect life and actions) and to accept responsibility for his actions.

### **See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God**

The writer of the Book of Hebrews has an exhortation for us, “See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12)

As we close this message the Holy Spirit wants us to focus on Psalm 15, “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.”