***Grace Orientation and a Relaxed Mental Attitude  
RO181-01***

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Please open your Bibles to Romans 15:1-6, as we continue with our subject of "The Spirit of Christ." This is segment number two.

**Strong Christians and Weak Christians**

As you know, some Christians are well-taught in Bible doctrine, and they are positive to applying the Word of God in their lives. Such Christians are spiritually mature, and the Bible calls them strong Christians. They are strong in their faith in Jesus Christ. This position of spiritual enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, however, places a special responsibility on the strong Christian in his relationship to the weak brother – the Christian who is spiritually immature. The strong believer, Paul has pointed out, is obliged before God to get under the load of spiritual weakness which is upon the weak Christian. The strong helps carry the weak with the hope of freeing him from all of his spiritual misconceptions and his hangups that make him a weak Christian.

The weak Christian, we are aware, tends to be arrogant and self-righteous, and so he is not always appreciative of being helped by the strong. He is the kind of person that thinks he is already in the know, and that he is with it, and does not see himself as he really is, because he does not have enlightened spiritual eyes. The strong Christian, however, is not free to just please himself with his own liberty in Christ, which indeed he has, and to go about ignoring what may even be an offensive, irritating brother in the Lord.

**Sanctification**

The strong Christian seeks to avoid offending the weak, therefore, in order to be able to bring him into God's good. And we pointed out that the good which the grace of God has provided is threefold. There is, first of all, the good of grace salvation resulting in positional sanctification. Then there is the good of divine blessing on earth, through doctrine and the filling of the Holy Spirit, which results in experiential sanctification. The third good is the good of blessing in eternity of rewards and crowns for Christian service, resulting in ultimate sanctification.

So, when the Bible tells us that all things work together for good for the believer (this one whom God has called into eternal life) that good is a very distinctive and an enriched good. It goes from salvation, to capacity to live on this earth as a godly person, to carrying into eternity the great blessings of rewards.

**Edification**

The purpose of God's good upon the weak Christians is very specific, and that is indicated to us at the end of verse 2 where we stopped last time. We are to seek to bring this threefold good into the life of a believer for his personal edification. So, Paul says, at the end of verse 2: "To his edification. The word "to" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the preposition "pros," and it means "looking toward." It means looking toward his edification. This word "edification" is "oikodome." The word "oikodome" means the act of building something. Here it is referring to building up a weak brother spiritually, so that he ends up with a spiritual maturity structure in his soul. This word explains the purpose of the three phases of good that we have just looked at, which we seek to bring into the life of a weak brother.

What we are trying to do is to help the weak Christian overcome his problem. And what is his problem? His problem is that he does not have a structure of spiritual maturity in his soul. Therefore, our job is to edify him by helping him to build that structure in his soul. The edification of a believer into a spiritual maturity structure, so that he actually ends up fully developed in that structure, and has the level of super grace living now at hand, is the product of the ministry of the pastor-teacher in the local church. Ephesians 4:12 points that structure out to us. This is one of the most important verses in the ministry of the local church. It is at the heart of the great breakdown within the Christian community. It explains why the average Christian looks suspiciously upon people who are devoted to the principles of the Word of God.

**Fundamentalists**

You would be surprised at the steady stream of descriptions that comes back to me from people toward this congregation. I told you about the lady at the public library, referring to "that fundamentalist church in South Dallas." And yesterday, one of our people said that one of their family members calls Berean Church a cult group. And all those phrases mean one thing. You actually believe that the Bible is literally true. Therefore, you are a devotee of the fundamentals of biblical teaching. That's what a fundamentalist is. Furthermore, you are devoted to such an extent that you invest your life; your treasure; and, your talents, on a serious day-by-day basis, to the work of God.

That's what Mormons do. That's what Jehovah's Witnesses do. That's what the heart of Hara Krishna's do at the airport, in selling their little books and collecting. That's like the people who stand at the stoplight, selling the roses for their religious group. Those are cult groups. Those are nuts. They're so fanatical.

However, these people do not understand that, indeed, we are fans of the Word of God. And that's what the word "fanatical" means – that you're a fan. We are fans of Jesus Christ. We are fans of doctrine. But you are not welcome in Satan's world when you have that attitude.

So, what the Word of God tells us is that every preacher that ever opens his mouth in the pulpit is responsible to execute Ephesians 4:12. And I can assure you that most of the preachers who are opening their mouths this day in this country will not fulfill Ephesians 4:12 by a long shot. So, the people in their congregation, when they come up against someone who has sat under the results of Ephesians 4:12 – they find a person who is deeply knowledgeable and educated in the Word of God. They are trained in doctrinal principles. They understand what God thinks, and they understand what God expects, and they understand how God works, and they know how to bang up their lives, or they know how to bless their lives. They know both ways because they understand from instruction in the Word. They're not just talking about a few cute little Bible stories. They are talking about what the Bible calls the deep things of the Spirit of God.

So, what are we talking about here? What is the problem? If you are going to edify a weak Christian, and if you're going to take a person who is newborn in the Christian life, and carry him over into spiritual maturity, this is the system that God has provided by which that's done. If that pastor-teacher is not standing up in that pulpit, and executing this verse, those Christians are going to stay small, cheap, self-centered, and uneducated in the Word of God, not knowing whether they're going to heaven from one moment to the next, and having no understanding of the fact that they are the royal family of God, without the slightest concept of how they should live, and how they should invest for their own eternity.

**Apostles**

In Ephesians 4:11, the apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit says that God has provided certain communicator gifts to the church. These are in the form of gifted men. These are never in the form, in these particular categories, of women who have these spiritual gifts. There are some who claim that that is so, but that is not true: "He gave some as apostles for communicating the Word of God." We no longer have apostles. You had to see Jesus Christ alive to qualify as an apostle. And there is no one who can qualify for that today.

**Prophets**

Also, He gave some men who had the gift of prophecy. They also brought enlightenment of God's mind. And we don't have any prophets today either. The prophets are phased out because you now have the Bible, so you no longer need direct communication from God. The Mormons lie when they tell you that, down the street from the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City, sits their prophet seer, who gets direct communications from God. If He gets direct communications, they don't come from above – they come from below.

**Evangelists**

Furthermore, he has given us some gifted men who have the ability, to make the gospel very clear and convincing, as evangelists, so that people are brought to salvation.

**Pastor-Teachers**

Then He gave a gift, which in this Greek Bible is a hyphenated word: "pastor-teacher." He is not just a teacher, but also a shepherd-teacher – one who bears a specific gift of communication as a pastor-teacher. Verse 12 now tells you why he gave this particular gift, which also still exists. We know clearly enough what the evangelist is to do. What he proceeds to explain is, that after the evangelist has one a person to Christ, he hands them off to the pastor-teacher, who then proceeds to execute verse 12 in the life of that believer. Here are three vital consequences which are listed as the result of the ministry of the pastor-teacher in the local church. These are consequences that are the result of his ministry of the Word of God. Each of these results is, in the Greek Bible, introduced by a preposition in such a way (in such a structure) that it indicates that one preposition is hooked to the next. It's a chain-reaction. So, you have preposition number one, and when this purpose is executed, it triggers a second reaction, which is introduced by preposition number two and, when that's done, that triggers a third reaction which is introduced by another preposition. So, if number one is never done, you never get number two. The chain-reaction will not explode. If it stops at the point of number two, then number three will never take place, and the chain-reaction is broken.

This is where the devil has hit the Christian community. He has hit at that particular point of the pastor-teacher executing the first preposition. And when he's done that, the devil has won it all.

**Face-to-Face**

Here is what it says in Ephesians 4:12: "For the equipping of the saints." The word "for" in the Greek Bible is the Greek word "pros." It is a preposition, and it indicates the pastor-teacher doing his job in a particular way, because this preposition means face-to-face. That's the background of this preposition. It means one person eyeball-to-eyeball with another person. And that's where the local church comes in. That is the primary way in which the pastor-teacher gift is administered. It's the primary way in which this teacher is pastor of the flock (and deals with the flock) in instructional situations. He faces them, which means that they have to face him.

We have a lot of sheep in this flock who are not facing me right now because, for one reason or another, they are someplace else. Every valuable gem of divine viewpoint that you will hear today, will miss them completely because they have not been here to hear it face-to-face. Fortunately, we record it so they can pick it up later. But if they don't look at my face, they have missed something as well (I think).

**Equipping**

With this face-to-face instruction in doctrinal principles, Paul says that the result is: "the equipping of the saints." The word "equipping" is "katartismos." "Katartismos" is a military word, and it means "preparing for combat." Here, of course, this is spiritual combat. It means boot camp training so that you are prepared with basic training to know how to handle the weapons; you have the information; you have the guidance; and, you have the capacity for spiritual warfare.

**The Saints**

Who is it that is to be prepared? It is the saints, which is the Greek word "hagios," which means "holy," and it is referring to the holy ones who are in the body of Christ through salvation in Jesus Christ.

So, the first thing that happens to a person is born again (to a new Christian, and to a weak Christian) is the pastor-teacher has to set in motion the first link in this chain reaction. He has to stand up before this crowd, and he has to explain to them the Word of God. He does not explain to them how he feels about this; how he feels about that; what he thinks about this; what he thinks about that; or, any of the other opinions. Those are all secondary. He opens the Scripture. He reads it. He tells the people what is behind the English words. And now they know what God the Holy Spirit thinks. And now they can feed, indeed, upon the Word of God. They are capable of growing into the image of Christ. They become educated in the Bible, so that they will not speak as fools and as ignorant people. And when he does that (when he has giving them that instruction), they are now in a position where they are saints who are equipped. They are combat ready.

**The Purpose**

That triggers now the second purpose, which is introduced by the preposition "eis." And this means "unto a purpose." Having hooked onto the first (they are trained for combat), now the purpose of that training is the combat itself: "For the work of service." It indicates a divine purpose of the first prepositional phrase.

**Spiritual Combat**

What is that purpose? Work: "ergon." This is a Greek word for activities here under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We call this divine good works. "For the work," he says, "of service." The word "service" is the Greek word "diakonia." "Diakonia" is the word for a Christian service in terms of spiritual combat. So, in other words, once you have been trained for spiritual combat, so that you don't get your head blown off by some smart-mouthed unbeliever (or cultist), and when you understand the basics of the Christian life, so that no matter who comes up against you, like Peter says, "You are fully prepared to give an answer for the things you believe." And you don't give that answer with some inane reference to what your church believes, or to what doctrinal statement you hold to, or to what your preacher has said. But you go back and you quote what the God who wrote the Bible has said, so that people are confronted with Him. You cannot do that if you have not had the Scriptures explained to you. You cannot have it explained to you if you're off drifting someplace else, and you're not sitting in the instructional periods of the public services. But when you have that, you will now be ready for the work of service.

Since it is a work of service, I repeat that basic guiding principle that you heard before: Christian service means not doing something else. The reason we don't have a lot of Christians working in the service of God is because they're working in their own service, or they're working in things that God has never asked them to do, but that they are interested in doing – things that captivate their attention, and things that are fun for them, but they are not working as the result of a divine call and direction. God is going to prepare you for service, and then He's going to give you that service to perform. He will never put you in a position of service for which you have not been equipped previously.

Many Christians are never indeed in the work of God because they have never prepared themselves. They have never taken seriously their own understanding and study and feeding upon the Word of God. But having done this, chain number two is linked to number one. And the result is that these people who have been taught are now prepared for Christian service. If the pastor-teacher, then, is not equipping the soldiers of Jesus Christ with Bible doctrine, these soldiers cannot engage victoriously in the service of spiritual combat. But once you are equipped, then you can be successful in fighting the devil on his own ground. You will not stay successful if you become careless in your own life, and become negative toward the Word of God. And people that we have seen very effective in the Word of God, carrying a powerful voice, because God was indeed moving behind them, have become totally incapacitated spiritual casualties with no voice that anybody pays attention to. They became that because they forgot the combat principles they were taught. If you go into real combat, and you break the rules that you've been taught on the field of battle, you will get shot up, and maybe killed. There are things you can do, and there are things you must not do, if you are in physical combat, because there are procedures that you must follow: techniques; handling your weapon; and, all kinds of things.

Here God is saying, "You may be a strong, solid Christian that everybody looks up to. We rejoice in our blessings that come from you, because your training in God's Word is being reproductive in God's work, and we are the beneficiaries of it. But if you start drifting off from those principles of the Word of God; if you start the breaking the moral rules; or, if you start getting your opinion ahead of the truth of Scripture, you will find very quickly that you'll fall into reversionism, and the best of soldier will be brought down. But if the pastor-teacher hasn't done number one in the chain-reaction, number two cannot take place. The failure of the pastor-teacher in his congregation short-circuits the building of spiritual maturity in the soul. The whole grace system of perception is brought down because people are not taught the Word of God.

This is the trouble with churches. And why people stay, and hang on, and keep going to churches, and pour their money, and their effort, and their lives in, knowing that they're not getting anything good, I'll never understand. It is crazy. It is not uncommon (and it happened recently again) for somebody, to walk in and say, "We have been acquainted for years with Berean tapes." As one young man recently said, "My dad goes to the big church in Dallas, and our worldwide renowned preacher preaches the Bible, but he does it in a very shallow denominational way, and he has a congregation that basically is made up of shallow people who are devoted to their denomination, but have never made the connection between themselves and the royal family of God, and all the deep privileges that God has for them." And he said, "My father goes to the church. He's used to it. He's associated with it." And probably, he didn't tell me it's good for his business and for other reasons, but he feeds on the Berean tapes. You would be surprised how many times that happens. And I'm bewildered.

I wanted to say, "Well, why doesn't he just shove off, and come to where the food is? Why is he waiting for somebody to bring some stuff out of the banquet hall every week?" I don't know. But this is the problem for Christians. And it is absolutely foolish for them to hang in there and be starved spiritually. If that happens, because the pastor-teacher is not really explaining the Word of God, you will have a Christian who cannot become spiritually mature because he is not ready for spiritual combat. This is the kind of Christian you will see who is running around acting on his experiences and on his emotions. That's why the charismatics run around, devoted to experience and emotions, because they are basically ignorant of the doctrines of Scripture.

You will find a Christian who exudes good works from every pore of his body, but they're all human good works created by his own sin nature, having nothing to do with the work of God. Do you realize how much religious money is poured into operations that God has nothing to do with? Do you know how many large churches in this city alone that God has nothing to do with, but who have great prestige and great influence in religious circles? And people think that that's where it's at, because nobody has ever shown them Ephesians 4:12. Once you know this verse, you can walk into any church anywhere, and you can sit there for a few weeks, and you'll spot them; you'll classify them; you'll understand where they're coming from; and, you'll be able to put them in the right slot, because you'll be able to tell what this preacher is doing, and what he's not doing.

This is no big secret. All you have to do is be there a few weeks, not just once. He might have an off Sunday. But after a few weeks, you'll get the trend. And when you match that up against this verse (of Ephesians 4:12), you'll know what you're dealing with.

So, the consequence of all this failure to prepare people for the work of service is that God's word is not being carried forward in Satan's world. But if that pastor has done that; the person has received with positive volition that instruction in the Word of God; he has been prepared for the work or service; and, he is doing the work of Christian service, the third thing results: "to the building up." This word "to" is also sometimes translated as "for." And it has the preposition "eis" again, indicating the third link in this chain: from "pros;" to "eis;" to "eis." This third preposition is dependent upon the second one being executed. This third one says, "To (or 'for') the building up of the body of Christ." "Building up" is the Greek word "oikodome," which means "the act of building something," which means "edification."

This is what we started with. This is what Paul said: "Take your weaker brother; get under his load; and, get him under the authority of the Word of God, where the chain reaction is working; where the pastor-teacher is teaching; where this person is equipped for combat; and, where he gets into combat with spiritual service. And the result will be that he, with this edification, in his own soul, will start edifying the body of Christ, which refers to the church. This is done by leading lost people into salvation with the gospel. This is done by helping them to erect a spiritual maturity structure in their own souls, through the grace system of perception that God has provided. So, the result is that the church, the body of Christ, is built up to maturity.

What will be the result? If verse 12 is executed, the result will be verse 13: "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Verse 13 says, "You will have a mature combat soldier, spiritually trained, who is able to get into grips with the evils of Satan's world, and to come out victoriously." That is God's purpose, and verse 12 is the way God does it.

When the people of God do not understand this, then they tolerate a church ministry that is not centered upon explaining biblical principles to them. This is what Peter meant when he said, "I am an elder, and I tell all the rest of you elders (meaning to pastor-teacher) to feed the flock of God." The apostle Paul – the last message, as he was leaving to go back to Jerusalem, the last time he was going to have contact with the leaders of Ephesus, gathered with them on the seashore, and said, "Feed the flock of God over which God has made you an overseer." Again and again, that is where it's at. That is the important thing. It is not how many parties we run for you. It is not how many covered-dish suppers we have. It is not how many fun events we have. It is not how many picnics we have. There are some people that never show up here unless we're going to have a Christmas or Easter cantata; unless we're going to have a church picnic; or, unless we're going to have some other fun event. Then we see them. To them, that's the fellowship, and that's the extent of what they're looking for. And they are the shriveled, little people who are living their lives, and boy, are they ever going to get a shock when they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? And most of them are very arrogant. They're very snide. They're very confident. And they're very nothing.

**A Spiritual Maturity Structure in the Soul**

Well, we've used the phrase "spiritual maturity structure" several times. We do not like to use words that have no meaning. What do we mean by a spiritual maturity structure in the soul (an SMS)? Turn to 2 Corinthians 12:10. The background is the apostle Paul observing that, because on one occasion he was taken into heaven, probably when he was stoned at Lystra, and actually killed – he was taken into heaven, and he saw what a marvelous place that was. But the Lord said to him, "Paul, you must never tell people what it's like to be in heaven. You must never tell people what you have seen up here. I know you're going to get excited, in your enthusiasm for the Lord, and you're liable to start talking. So, I'm going to give you a physical ailment. It's going to be painful. It's going to be just that dull background. You'll always know it's there, but it'll always remind you not to talk about heaven.

**Power is Perfected in Weakness**

So, Paul had this ailment, and it was very distressing to him. In the context, the earlier part of 2 Corinthians 12, he says, "He went three times and said, 'Lord, I think You can trust me. Can You take this irritation (this painful thing) away from me?'" But God said, "No, I know it's a burden. I know it's very uncomfortable, but I'm going to carry you through. My grace will carry you through." And Paul said, "I just felt so helpless and so weak." But then Paul said in verse 10, "In spite of my weakness, I realized something very important." Yes, up in verse 9, God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." And Paul said, "What did you say, Lord." And God said, "I said that power is perfected in weakness." If you want to be a strong, powerful voice for God, you will find that power out of weakness, not out of your arrogant, self-confidence, such that you know things because you're been around.

**Weaknesses**

And Paul began thinking about that, and God the Holy Spirit made the connection for him. And we are the beneficiaries in verse 10. Paul says, "Therefore, I realize now I am well-content with five things." Number one is weaknesses. The Greek word there is "asthenia." "Asthenia" means "inability to produce." Paul says, "I can't produce anything spiritually. I am really weak – but I like that. Why? He's talking about a condition here of spiritual helplessness – some incapacity. There's a related word to this one which is used in Romans 14:2. It's a word we've already looked at. It has to do with weakness in terms of being a legalist. Romans 14:2: "One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is an 'asthenia' type (this same word in its verb form here) eats vegetables only." Why does he eat vegetables? Because he thinks it pleases God if he doesn't eat meat.

**Total Depravity**

So, this word of incapacity and weakness here is illustrated by this person who won't eat any meat, because he's making points with God. Legalism is a weakness. Human weaknesses are the product, of course, of the total depravity in the human soul. Total depravity does not mean that you are uncouth, uncultured, or unrefined. Total depravity means that, because you are contaminated by sin nature, you cannot do one thing on your own to please God. The only thing that pleases God is what God the Holy Spirit does through you. This is pointed out to us in Romans 3:12, where Paul says, "All have turned aside. Together they have become useless. There is none who does good. There is not even one." That is total depravity.

**Grace Orientation**

Paul points out this same concept in Romans 8:7-8, where he says, "Because the mind set on the flesh (that is, the sin nature) is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the Law of God. For it is not even able to do so." And those who are in the flesh, under the control of the sin nature, cannot please God. So, the apostle Paul is talking about that kind of a weakness: "I can't do anything to please God. Because of the nature in me, every human best capacity I have is contaminated." The spiritually mature Christian meets the problem of his weakness with what we call grace orientation. I can't do it. God has to come in and do something for me. The grace of God takes up the slack of my incapacity.

In 2 Peter 3:18, this concept of grace orientation is referred to when Peter says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Grow in grace. Get oriented to the concept that God does things for people that they don't deserve to have done for them. Where they have a weakness and an incapacity to produce, He comes through and makes them magnificent producers.

Hebrews 13:9 also says, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings. For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited." Paul says, "It isn't your ritual of what you eat or you don't eat. Your weakness (natural weakness) can only be solved by grace from God Himself."

So, human helplessness can be overcome by the grace favor of God in one's life. God's grace, when it is free to operate, will overcome the believer's natural incapacities that are placed upon him by his sin nature. We remember, therefore, that all that a Christian is, and all he does, and all he becomes, is solely the product of God's grace working through the Word of God. The apostle Paul, because he was grace-oriented, was well aware of the essence of God working in his behalf. When Paul thought about God, he thought about the grace of God as expressed through the character of God toward him. And he understood, by what God was, how God was going to treat him. He understood that because God was absolute righteousness, He was going to treat him in that way. Because God was justice, He was going to treat him in that way. Because God was love; He was eternal life; He was omniscient; He was omnipotent; He was omnipresent; He was immutable (He never changes); and, He was veracity. He knew that because of these characteristics of God, that God was going to treat him in an absolutely wonderful, fair way. So, Paul leaned back and waited upon God to come through for him.

The grace-oriented Christian, therefore, will find that he is able to treat those who abuse him with a gracious spirit of forgiveness. When somebody does something improper toward you, you immediately forgive, and you forget, and you do not hold the fact that they are threatening and abusing you. Only a grace Christian can do that. It is very hard for us to ignore the ugliness of some Christians toward us. In Ephesians 4:32, the Lord says, "To those of you who are oriented in your maturity, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." You will notice that that verse did not say, "As soon as that person comes up and looks you in the eye and says to you, "I'm sorry for what I did. Will you forgive me?" That then you forgive them. There is that kind of instruction in some Christian circles, and it's totally false. Ephesians 4:32 says, "If somebody hits you up in a wrong way, forgive them, and forget it." Put it behind you. Go on. Don't let it become a hangup in your life. Be a grace-oriented Christian.

Colossians 3:13 adds to that: "Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other. Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." You were not forgiven by our Lord because you deserved it. And you're not forgiven by Him because you ask for it. He has already forgiven all your sins. The question is whether you will accept the forgiveness. An unforgiving spirit spreads a bad attitude with its evil among other believers who will pick up your unforgiving attitude, and they will share it.

A legalistic mentality, furthermore, you should know, is open to a lot of personal depression. Somebody may come along and says, "Oh, I'm so depressed. I'm having a terrible fit of depression. I just don't know how to handle this. I'm in such a blue, dark mood." One of the first things I suspect is an unforgiving spirit. It is a key feature of depression when you do not act with grace toward those who have in some way injured you.

**Insults**

The next thing, Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 12:10, is that he's not only delighted for his weakness, which he can handle with grace orientation, but he says, "I'm happy when I get insults. And the Greek word is "hubris." This word means "insolence" or "insulting mockery." Are you happy when you get insolence, Paul, or when you get somebody's mockery?" It connotes an attitude of arrogance on the part of other people. And no one can be more arrogant than the dumb, carnal, biblically uneducated Christian.

This same word is used in the verb form in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, which will illustrate what he's talking about: "But after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel amid much opposition, amid much mockery, insolence, and insult." We are telling you how to get to heaven, and you're abusing us with your words. The treatment which tempts the spiritually immature to respond with some mental attitude of hatred and revenge, will not overcome the Christian who is spiritually mature. The spiritually mature Christian has a capacity built in his soul that helps him to overcome this abuse – the treatment of someone's arrogance; someone's insolence; the slander; the insult; or, the invasion of your privacy. God says, "You don't react to that with a bitter spirit. Instead, you do that which is good. Or the time when you've done somebody a great service, a real divine good service under the enablement of the Holy Spirit – then they react with jealousy; with envy; with competition; or, they put you down. Now how are you going to react? This is the kind of equality that Paul says, "We are hit with as Christians."

**A Relaxed Mental Attitude**

Well, Paul says, "The answer is a relaxed mental attitude," we may call it. This is illustrated in Ephesians 4:31: "Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and slander be put away from you along with all malice." If somebody improperly hits you up, what do you do with it? Put it behind you. You forget it. You don't demand their apology. You don't demand that they express their regret. You leave that with the Lord.

Colossians 3:15 says this: "But let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful." So, the relaxed mental attitude is a marvelous facet of personal Christian maturity. The apostle Paul says, "When someone hits me up with insolence and insults, I'm glad, because it gives me a chance to use my relaxed mental attitude. A relaxed mental attitude believer is one who is at peace with God and man. He's a believer who takes his burden to the Lord, and he leaves it there. He doesn't respond to insults with a sense of rejection, or crying, or pouting, or self-pity, or vindictiveness. Has somebody ever rejected your kindness, and you go to tears over it? Has somebody rejected your true Christian service, and you pout about it: "That sluggard, I'll never do anything nice for him again. This is an immaturity on the part of a believer.

God says, "The Christian who knows how to take insults in stride, has had a maturity built into him by God the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God. Because the pastor-teacher did his job, this Christian learned how to be grace-oriented. Because the pastor did his instructional work, this person can take insults, and can take them in stride without resentment, or himself becoming part of the problem. Just go ahead and accept yourself the way God made you. Watch for His plan to unfold for you. You are not perfect. Just beware that you do not harbor a spirit of bitterness toward God, because that also will lead to a lot of depression. Instead, the Bible makes the amazing statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Whatever comes, you thank God for it.

**Faith Rest**

So, the Christian with a relaxed mental attitude knows how to take things in stride. How do you do that? You do that with one other doctrine that you have to apply: faith rest. The Christian takes things in stride when he does all he can to resolve a problem, and then he hands it over to the Lord. Now, just think back how many times you've followed that procedure. It was something that you could not resolve, and something that you went humanly as far as you could, and then you turned to the Lord, and you left the burden with Him. And, suddenly, sure enough, he changed people; He changed circumstances; He directed everything away from the thing that concerned you that you were fearful of; He moved it in a good direction; and, everything turned out great. This is what we're talking about. The person who is abused takes that in stride, in trusting God by faith to deal with the individual and to solve the problem. It enables a person to be relaxed in his soul, and to understand that the battle is the Lord's. Therefore, that's where he leaves the battle.

These are just two things that the apostle Paul has thus far indicated is spiritual edification: grace orientation; and, a relaxed mental attitude. There are three more that form the pentagon of defense, and the base of attack in the soul of a mature Christian. When you have a legalistic brother who is irritating, the Bible says, "We get under his load to take him into God's great good." The reason we want to bring him into God's great good, through the instruction in the Word of God, is so that he will become an edified believer. He will become a Christian like this. He will have a spiritual maturity structure in his soul. Then he will be a prince and princess in the family of God.

Paul says, "When I can't get anything done, I fall back upon the grace of God, and boy, does it work? He learned to be a grace oriented person. Paul says, "When I can't handle those insults and that abuse and that rejection, I fall back again upon a relaxed mental attitude, because I faith-rest the issue with God. And boy, does peace come into my soul, and do things begin to get resolved and fall into place?" God is going to do what is right.

The other three facets are equally important. This is an area that we must remind ourselves of, because it is so easy to slip away, and to let one of these walls become weak. And that's all it takes for the enemy to come charging in. Next time, we should look at the other three.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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