***God's Power in our Weakness

RV42-02***

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation 3:7-13 as we continue studying the letter to the church in the city of Philadelphia. The local congregation in Philadelphia is being analyzed by its leader (its head), the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is both holy and genuine, His evaluation will be completely honest and true. Since Jesus Christ has the sovereign authority of the royal House of David, He is able to open doors to service; to spiritual maturity; to prosperity; and, to promotion which no one can close to the believer.

The Lord Jesus Christ was fully informed about the service and the mental attitudes behind that service of the Philadelphia believers. The Philadelphia Christians had apparently seized the opportunity to serve the Lord. They realized that the open doors for Christian service also meant opportunity for restoring treasures in heaven. So, this church in many ways was obviously one that pleased the Lord. It was one of His favorites. They took the opportunity for developing spiritually. That was the first thing that the open door provided. It provided them with the capacity to move into super grace blessings. That is, of course, what God has for every one of us. When you enter the Christian life, what the Lord has for you, as part of your inheritance, is super grace blessings. We looked at that a little bit again last time. James 4:6 refers to that.

However, there is a contingency. Nobody can receive super grace blessing until you have the capacity to receive that blessing. And that capacity is in the form of a spiritual maturity structure built in your soul. This is built as the result of taking Bible doctrine into the perceptive side of your mentality so that you receive knowledge which the Bible calls "gnosis." That is simply information. It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't do anything. It simply means that you now know something because you've been instructed. Then you act upon that negatively or positively. If, under the filling and guidance of the Holy Spirit, you act with positive response (you believe it, and you receive it), this information is now cycled down into your human spirit where it is stored. Now it becomes what the Bible calls full knowledge ("epignosis" knowledge). This is the knowledge that now can be used in your life. This knowledge is cycled up to your mentality in order to guide the other side of your thinking (the other facet) – the directive side of your mind, which holds the decision-making qualities.

Of course, it is the mind which controls the emotions, and it is the mind that controls the will. The only reason your mentality knows how to tell your emotions how to feel is because you have doctrine guiding it. Then it is compatible with God's feelings. The only way your mind has ability to tell your will what to do, so that it is pleasing to God, is when doctrine has told your mind what to tell your will to do. The mind is the male in the structure of the soul. The emotions and the will play the role of the female. They are subject to the mentality. When that is reversed, and the emotions take charge of the human being, it is sheer disaster. When that happens in the religious realm, Satan has a field day.

**The Spiritual Maturity Structure**

So, this information is cycled: you learn it; you accept it; you store it in categories in the human spirit; and, God the Holy Spirit cycles it up to the mentality as you need it to give guidance; to control the emotions; and, to control the will. The result of all that is that gradually in your soul there develops a five-sided Pentagon known as the spiritual maturity structure. 2 Corinthians 12:10 refers to this structure where the apostle Paul speaks about a variety of weaknesses that he is grateful for, because they produce certain strengths in him.

**Grace Orientation**

One he calls "infirmities." Infirmities develop into grace orientation; that is, the capacity to deal on the basis of the grace of God, and to live on the basis of the grace of God rather than on the pressures of human ability.

**A Relaxed Mental Attitude**

He calls another weakness "reproaches." Reproaches develop into a relaxed mental attitude. This is a concept of an attitude free from bitterness. It is an attitude of love. It is an attitude that waits upon the Lord. It is an attitude that realizes that the battle is the Lord's.

**The Mastery of the Details of Life**

Another weakness he has, he calls "necessities." That develops into the mastery of the details of life. This gives the believer the ability to deal with material things in such a way that they are used and not abused – that they do not control you.

**The Capacity to Love**

Another weakness that Paul faced was "persecutions." Persecutions develop the capacity for love: the ability to love God; then to love your mate; and, then to love your friends. Those three categories of love are the result of the spiritual maturity structure in the soul. 1 John 2:5 makes this principle clear: "But whosoever keeps His word (that is, the Word of God) in Him, verily is the love of God perfected. By this we know that we are in Him. It could not be put any more clearly than it is put in that verse. (Of course, you have to have doctrine first in order to go positive toward it.) The person that goes positive toward doctrine is the person in whom the love of God is perfected; matured; and, developed. So, all this nonsense about telling people to be loving, and this nonsense of telling Christians to be loving Christians, is asking them to do something that they cannot do unless they feed doctrine into the soul so that they can be transformed into loving people, because that's what does it. Persecutions enable us to develop the capacity to love. The exercise of the capacity to love is the result of taking doctrine into the soul. All of these things come because doctrine is being cycled into the mentality.

**Inner Happiness**

Finally, Paul says that another problem he has is "distresses," and he rejoices in that one because that produces the quality of inner happiness. There may be hell outside, but you have a millennium in your soul. Your personal happiness is not dependent upon persons; upon circumstances; or, upon things.

That results in a container into which God (as per James 4:6) can pour super abounding grace. That is grace which is overflowing, and that is the prime of your spiritual life. It is spiritual capacity at its maximum, and it is, of course, also the prime of your earning rewards in heaven. It is the super grace Christian who is going to be the richest in heaven.

This super grace structure (this structure of spiritual maturity) is the basis for performing Christian service in a maximum degree for rewards. It is also the believer's defense mechanism for the meeting of the demonic world in the angelic conflict. It is also the Christians basis of offense. It is from this structure (this pentagon) that he attacks, and he moves forward in the angelic conflict. So, this is your point of defense, and it is your point of attack as well. Without this, you cannot defend yourself. Without this, you cannot go forward in the angelic conflict and enjoy victory.

So, this is very important. This spiritual maturity structure is, in fact, the glory of God in the soul of the believer. It is a major breakthrough in the life of a Christian when he realizes the supreme role of Bible doctrine in his soul. That's why I'm taking the time to review this. If you want to get this in great detail (I'm only skimming the surface here), then go back and get the studies in the basic series and the Philippians series that deal with this subject in great detail. But when a Christian gets hold of what doctrine does in his soul, relative to the spiritual maturity structure, and what that means to him now and in eternity, that is a major breakthrough. It is a breakthrough which is secondary only to when the gospel hit home and you realized your need to accept that truth. Most Christians just get saved and make the breakthrough into eternal life, but they never make the breakthrough into spiritual maturity. That is simply because nobody has ever brought it together for them and shown them what that means in their souls; how they get it; and, how they function on it so that God the Holy Spirit can lead them.

Oh, they hear a lot about God the Holy Spirit leading them, but the Holy Spirit does not lead in a vacuum. This is how He leads. The more you have of this in your soul, the more He leads you. The less you have, the lower the level of leading that is available to you. So, this, once grasped, becomes a major breakthrough in the life of the believer. When a person grasps this, then he becomes a fan of the Word of God. Then he enters the status of maximum blessing; of maximum success; and, maximum prosperity. But until he makes this breakthrough on this subject, he doesn't go very far. This is true of those of you who are teachers of the Word of God: people who are in the ministry (the pastorate); Sunday school teachers; Bible class teachers; academy teachers; and, people who are, in one way or another, instructing in the Word of God. Until you have made this breakthrough, your ministry does not have a significant reason. This is the "raison d'être" that makes it all meaningful. With this, you suddenly realize what it's all about.

Several years ago, I was at the Alaska Bible College. Our old friend Bob Lee had me up there for two weeks of Bible lectures, and one of the things that I dealt with was this basic concept. In that class were the people who (right at the end of those two weeks) were the graduates. I was there for the graduating ceremony, and they stood up one-at-a-time and gave their testimonies. Every one of them had something to say in reference to what they had secured during the past two weeks relative to what the Word of God was all about in the Christian life. And these are people who were graduates of the Bible college. This is what they went there for. I remember one girl who stood up and said, "And I must say that only in the last two weeks have I found the reason for what I was studying here in this school. I have found the reason for the Word of God and its importance, and why what I am going to be doing is the most vital thing in all the world – telling people what God has revealed to us in Scripture." I thought, "Man, that was well put." It was it was such a significant demonstration of a breakthrough that I'm talking about. She made it that week, and she put it very effectively in describing what had happened to her.

So, this is a breakthrough. Until you've made it, you're going to come to church; you're going to sit around; you're going to learn a little bit about the Bible; and, you're going to enjoy the fellowship, but that's about all it will amount to. But once you make this breakthrough, you're not going to be satisfied with Sunday. You're going to be finding yourself turning during the week again and again to the Word of God. You're going to find yourself turning again and again to the listening to audio recordings, and to the study of the instruction, and to the reading of books. You're going to find that your soul begins to feed upon the Word of God.

Those of you who are young people – in almost 30 years of ministry here, I've seen kids go through this place. Some of you are adults here now, and I've seen you as young people who made this breakthrough. And you have grabbed hold of the meaning of the Word of God, and you began feeding on it daily. Man, only a blind man would not see the way God has prospered your lives; how things have fallen together, how things have come into place; how God has led you; and, how you've made the right decisions, and you have hardly bungled any place along the line. We've seen others of you who grew up, and you didn't pay too much attention to this. You never really made this breakthrough. Your lives have had the ups and downs, and they've got the scars and the wounds upon them. Maybe it's time to get straightened out. Those of you who are young; those of you who are in high school; and, those of you who are on the threshold of college age, wake up. Take a lesson from those who've gone before you. Save yourself their agonies. Make the breakthrough. This is the thing that makes all the difference in the world.

This is what the Lord loved about the Philadelphia church. That's what He was commending them for when, in verse 8, He said to them, "I know your works. I know what you're doing. I know what's behind those works in the form of your mental attitudes. And I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." Part of the open door that the Lord gave to them was the availability of the Word of God, and the availability of building a spiritual maturity structure in their souls. Evidently, the congregation at Philadelphia, as a whole, had made the breakthrough. They knew why it was important to learn the doctrines of the Word of God.

However, they were in a position that we can relate to. For the Lord, in verse 8, says, "For you have a little strength." The word "for" is the Greek word "hoti." This is a conjunction. Here, it basically means "because." It introduces the reason for the divine provision of an open door to spiritual maturity; to the consequent service; to the resulting rewards; and, to personal prosperity and promotion. The Lord says, "I have opened this door, and nobody is going to close this door to you. And here is the reason that I have done that. It is because there is a condition that is true about you. I am pleased with you. I am ready to bless you. Therefore, I have opened this door unto you – the door to spiritual maturity and all that that connotes."

He says, "The reason I'm doing this is because you have." The word "have" is the Greek word "echo," which means "to possess something." Here, it refers to the status of the Philadelphia church. This is present tense which means that this was constantly their status. They were a stable group in this particular factor. It is active which means that they personally were experiencing this status. It's indicative – a statement of fact. They had only a little of something. The word "little" is "mikros." "Mikros" is an adjective. Here, it refers to quantity. The Philadelphia congregation possessed a very small amount of something. And what they possessed a small amount of was strength. The Greek word is "dunamis." The word "dunamis" actually means "power." Of course, you can readily see where the English word "dynamite" came from. It came from this Greek word (from this basic root concept) here in "dunamis, which is power. What's he talking about?

Well, he's referring to the fact that this church, within the society that surrounded it in the city of Philadelphia, was not a church that carried a lot of influence. It didn't carry a lot of weight within that society. It was a congregation which probably was not large. This was a church that had a congregation that was faithful to the Word of God, not in its doctrinal statement and not in its verbal professions, but in its actual functioning practices. The more faithful to the Word of God in practice, the smaller the congregation is. And it is very easy to be faithful to God in words (in a doctrinal statement) and what you get up and talk about the Lord. However, it is something else to put it into practice.

For example, we believe that God deals with us in grace. We believe that God is fully capable of supplying our needs. If we pray and ask Him, He will give us. If we don't pray, He says, "You have not because you ask not." We do not believe, therefore, that we should treat each other in any way other than the way that God treats us. He treats us without pressure. He gently speaks. He's a gentle voice. He opens doors, and He invites a positive response. Now, we believe all that: "Yes, sir. That's true. That's exactly what the Bible teaches." Well, let's take an offering. Let's get those plates down front. Let's get a big speech here. Let's get some crying. Let's get a lot of the preacher whining about the trouble, and let's try to make the people feel intimidated because of all those good cars they're driving, and that good life that they're enjoying. I see a couple of you have got new suits on. Now, let's see what we can do for the Lord's work here.

I saw a preacher one time who walked down the aisle and he collected the money personally. He couldn't hold change. It had to be bills – just greenbacks. He would say, "Here's $5. Thank you brother. Here's $10. Thank you sister." I've often thought that that's not a bad idea. I haven't got my courage up to do that, but I was just awed by him as he gathered hundreds of dollars out of that congregation. Now, it's one thing to believe in grace, but when you need the money, that's something else.

Well, let's just make it between you and the Lord. You're His priest. Part of your sacrifice is what the Bible calls the sacrifice of substance. If you are your own priest, that's a matter between you and God; it is nobody else's business; and, it's private. You should do it in complete freedom and privacy. There's a box at the door. When you get to the point where you've got a spiritual maturity structure in your soul, you're going to head for that door. It's quite evident. Some of you walk in this place, and you head for the box first thing. It's on your mind, and you take care of it. You have exercised your priesthood even before you got the sermon. That's because you don't want to take any chance on saying, "That was a lousy sermon. I'm going to cut down the offering this Sunday." You do it as unto the Lord, and you're not going to let yourself be swayed by the secondary factors. However, that's one thing to say it, but another thing to apply it. Well, you can multiply that many times.

Here in the Philadelphia congregation, you're not much of a group. You're probably not many in number. You're holding true to the Word of God, so a lot of people don't care to associate with you. You are suspect to them by the very fact that you're standing firm on the things of the Word of God. The congregation socially was obviously not made up of the prestige people of the community. They were just the common folks. They were not the people who were in positions of influence. So, again, there were people who did not want to be members of a congregation that didn't carry any prestige.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26, the apostle Paul says, "For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." That was characteristic of New Testament Christian assemblies. They were not the high and mighty. They were not the prestige groups. So, they possessed, apparently, very little respect in their pagan community. Therefore, they were in a position where they might feel intimidated. But the point of truth of the matter is that these believers, in reality, possess the great power of God.

In Ephesians 1:15-16, we have an interesting statement by the apostle Paul: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, ceased not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." The apostle Paul, in writing to one of his favorite churches, the Ephesian church, said, "I've heard about what you're doing. I've heard about your relaxed mental attitude toward people (toward believers), and I keep thanking the Lord every time I think of you, and I make mention of you in my prayers. So, Paul is saying, I'm praying for you. I'm pleased with what I hear about you. And I want you to know that I pray for you."

It would be interesting to know what it is that he asked the Lord for in behalf of the congregation that he could commend. But in verse 17 through 21, he tells us. Here is what he prayed for – "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened in order that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And that is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come."

**Power**

What is he saying? He is saying, "I'm praying that you would become informed in doctrinal understanding; and, that you become informed in divine viewpoint so that you might experience working in your soul the power of God." What kind of power? The power that it took to raise the dead body of Jesus Christ to life. If there's any power in the world that is powerful, that is a power. If there is anything that is frustrating to the human experience, it's to just be faced with something that you can't do anything about. You cannot reverse death. You cannot stop death. The desperation of that experience is the exact opposite of having the power of God where you can control even that. That is the power of the believer.

In the Old Testament, whenever the people of Israel look back to a demonstration of God's power in their behalf, they always look back to the Red Sea. The prophets would talk about the power of God, and the prophets would address God in prayer. When they would want to come to a reference point of the power of God, they would always go back to what happened at the Red Sea, and how God's power brought them through that safely. In the New Testament, the frame-of-reference point of the power of God that functions for believers is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What it took to raise Him from the dead is what Paul says, "I prayed would be just the normal experience of your daily life." Do you think that's an ideal? You're wrong. This is a fantastic actual experience that Paul is talking about. You go through life with the functioning of that kind of power in your behalf. Without the spiritual maturity structure in your soul, you'll never get close to it. That's what it's all contingent on. Paul prayed for them to function on the kind of power that took Jesus Christ out of that tomb and eventually put Him in heaven at the right hand of God.

In Luke 12:32, the Lord Jesus tells us that it is the Father's will to give His children the kingdom of God, and all that that connotes in power; in prosperity; and, in prestige: "Fear not, little flock, for it is our Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Notice the verses that bracket verse 32. Verse 31: "But rather seek the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you." What is that saying? It says that we are to be seeking first the things of the Lord, and seeking first spiritual development and the service that that opens to you." In verse 33, we have the consequences: "Sell what you have, and give alms. Provide yourselves bags which don't grow old; a treasure in the heavens that doesn't fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth corrupts." Do you see the pattern? Get your heart set on things above. Get your heart set on the things of the Lord; on the things of eternity; and, on the things of service. Verse 32 says that you're going to inherit everything that God had. Everything that Jesus Christ has, you're a co-heir with Him, and you share it. Therefore, verse 33 says, "Get your eyes off the temporal things. Get a mastery of the details of life so that you can put those things into perspective, and get your heart set on treasures in heaven. That's where it's really at."

In our weakness, we share with these Philadelphia Christians: personal weaknesses; and, personal limitations. As a congregation, we are a small group. We are a feeble folk. We are a group which does not carry great prestige. We are not the opinion makers. We do not move the community. Yet, here among us, because of the Word of God within this assembly and hundreds of assemblies like this one (it should be thousands, but it's only hundreds, if it's that many), there resides the awareness of the Word of God within the soul of the believer that enables human beings to rise above the mass of ordinary Christians, and to move into what these verses, that the Lord expressed in Luke, promised us – to inherit all the benefits of being members of the Kingdom of God.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 express that great principle of our weakness and God's strength. Here, the apostle Paul says, "And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for you." This was in reference to Paul's physical ailment. "For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities; in reproaches; in necessities; in persecutions; and, in distresses for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong." "For when I am weak, then I develop a spiritual maturity structure in my soul, and then I have strength."

It is interesting to stop and think back through the Word of God of historical examples that demonstrate this principle – the principal of the Philadelphia church. You have little power; you have little influence; and, you have little prestige. Yet, this is the kind of a church that turns the world upside down. This is the kind of a church that will have a voice that reaches far beyond its own confines. This will be a voice upon the lives of people far in excess of the size of that congregation, or its economic strength, or anything else about it. The Bible is filled with examples that this is when God is strong. When we are in the position of weakness, and recognize that, then God is strong.

This is true of us as a congregation, and it is true of you individually. I think that this is a very important point. Undoubtedly, we have some people in this congregation, as everywhere else, who have great confidence in their capacity. You have an education; you have abilities; you have personality traits that are very valuable; you view yourself as an achiever; you view yourself as a person who makes things happen; and, you view yourself as a person who is on the job and who knows how to move ahead. These are all the things that indeed the American character respects, and which indeed the Word of God commends, provided that you remember that at the bottom of it all, we are weak. Without the capacities that come from God Himself, you're not going to get very far. You will be brought down sooner or later. But God is a God who works with weakness, and weakness is a thing that enables us to become fantastically powerful. It's just the opposite of what the world thinks.

**Gideon**

Let's go back to Judges 6, and think about a poor sad sack named Gideon. Gideon was a reluctant man when suddenly, he's going about his business, secretly hiding his store of food. He bought some freeze-dried food. He was out there in the in the threshing barn secretly, because the Midianites now dominated the people of Israel, and they were making life burdensome. So, Gideon is out there threshing some grain. He's going to pack it in nitrogen to freeze-dry this stuff so that he can start storing it up for the bad days that he knows are coming. He is working secretly when suddenly he gets the shock of his life because somebody is standing there. Who is standing there but, lo and behold, the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ? That was a shock, for suddenly he sees himself face-to-face with the angel of the Lord, which is Christ before the incarnation.

So, let's read the story in Judges 6:11: "And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor.' And Gideon said to him, 'Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?'" You can see the base of power that they referred to?

"But now the Lord has forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." That's kind of a strange speech. The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Hail the man of valor." Gideon says, "Well, Lord, why is all this stuff happening to us? Why us? Why not to the Midianites? Look at all of these things that happened. Where are all of those miracles that we read about in the Bible? I read about those all the time, and here You have us into the hands of these miserable Midianites. We have nothing but trouble all the time." He sure is a man of valor.

Well, right away we begin to suspect that there's some weakness in this man of valor: "And the Lord looked upon him and said," 'Go in this your might, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have not I sent you?'" The Lord says, "Here is your point of strength, and you're going to save your people if you can grab hold of this. I have sent you. What else do you need to know? I, the living God, have sent you. Now you're a winner. Suddenly, your weakness has become God's strength."

"And he said unto Him, 'Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.'" Weakness, weakness, weakness: "And the Lord said unto him,' Surely I'll be with you, and you shall smite the Midianites as one man.' He said unto Him, 'If now I have found grace in your sight, then show me a sign that it is really You talking to me. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come unto You, and bring forth my present, and set it before You.' And He said, 'I will tarry until you come.'"

So, Gideon says, "I want to know if this is a dream or vision. I want proof that what You say is true. You're saying that I, as one man, am going to be able to bring down the Midianites. Do you know how many Midianites there are? We have thousands of them roaming around here. I mean military people, let alone the rest of those groups that are out there giving us all this trouble. What are you asking me to do? One man?" So, he says, "I have to find out about this." So, he brings an offering, and the story goes on, and he builds this meal.

Verse 21 says, "Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touch the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight."

Gideon had his answer. He had the picture very clear before him, and he was now convinced by this miraculous evidence that indeed God had sent a messenger to speak to him.

Move down to verse 36. Gideon is still not a strong man. Gideon is still weakness. Beginning at verse 36, notice how that weakness is again demonstrated: "And Gideon said unto God, 'If You will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.'" Isn't that something? Here he is, talking to the living God who has just said, "Here's your strength. I have sent you." So, he takes the Lord's sentence, "I have sent you," and he sticks a big "if" right in the middle of it. If that isn't weakness, I don't know what it is. Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said." How many "ifs" do you and I put before God, in spite of the fact of what we read in the Word of God – the "ifs" that make the exception in your case.

How many times (I can't remember) have I had people who wanted to get married? One was a Christian, and the other was not a Christian. And when I told them I couldn't perform that ceremony because that violates the Scripture, how many times have I had the argument given to me as to why, in this case, I should marry this person even though he or she is not a Christian: "God has told me this?" And I always have to say, "Well, God has also spoken to me. He told me something before he told you, and what he told me overrides what he told you, because what He told me is in the Bible. Therefore He has already spoken. Whoever you're listening to, it's not God, and I'd change my mind about this." They are putting an "if" in it. God has said, "Do not marry an unbeliever. Do not be unequally yoked."

However, they say, "Now, Lord, if you don't want me to be unequally yoked with a believer, I'm going to put this sheepskin on the wall. If tonight this sheepskin is wet, then I'll know you don't want me to marry that unbeliever." Well, this guy Gideon did it – the man of valor. Let's go on with the man of valor here. He says, "Behold, I'll put a fleece of wool in the door." And this person has the same idea: "And if the dew be on the fleece only, and if it be dry upon the earth beside it, then shall I know that You will save Israel by my hand as You have said:" "If you really said this, and if you really mean it, I want the sheepskin to be wet."

Now, God says, "Okay. Oh, boy. We have another one here." So, the Lord says, "Let's move him along and see if We can get him shaped up here for the battle:" "And It was so, for he rose up early on the next day and thrust the fleece together and rung the dew out of the fleece – a bowl full of water." Now is the man of valor certainly going to be more valorous? Nope – weakness: "And Gideon said unto God, 'Let not your anger be hot against me. And I will speak but this once. So let me make a trial, I pray, but once more with the fleece. Let it now be dry only upon the fleece; upon all the ground, let there be dew.' God did so that night, for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on the ground."

Well, the Lord was kind. He carried Gideon along, and He made it clear. This is a wrong thing to do. This was a wrong thing for Gideon to do. God treated him in grace, because God had already spoken to him. When the Word of God tells you to do something, you don't have to put a fleece out to find out what God wants you to do. You accept what God has told you to do. You have to start with the realization that the Bible is the authority that speaks for God. Once you've accepted that, then there is no further discussion.

The second thing you have to accept is the fact that God is not ignorant, and God is not incapacitated – that He cannot have a book written that you can understand. That's the other expression of unbelief. The first expression of unbelief is that God cannot speak to us. The second expression of unbelief is that He cannot speak to us in a way that we can understand intelligently: that God cannot produce a Bible that has no errors in it; and, that God cannot produce a Bible that we can read and understand. That is false. God has given you a full system from the canon of Scripture right down through the local church structure with the pastor-teacher gift and the Holy Spirit instructing you and revealing and illuminating Scripture to you for you to understand. Therefore, we do know what the Bible says. And when the Bible speaks, the issue is closed. Gideon had no business throwing this "if" into what God had said He was going to do with him.

So, Gideon proceeded to put out the call for troops throughout Israel. He gathered an army of 32,000 men. But then God turned around and said, "Gideon, I don't work too well when you're strong. I work a lot better when you're weak. So far, you've been weak, and I've been encouraging you, but now you have 32,000 troops, and you're a lot more encouraged, and you're a lot more confidence. So I'm going to have to do something about that.

Judges 7:2: "And the Lord said unto Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" Do you ever do that? "Now, therefore, go proclaim, in the hearing of our people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead,' and there returned 22,000, and there remained 10,000."

The Lord said, "Gideon, I want you to apply one of the principles of warfare. There is a Bible doctrine of warfare in the book of Deuteronomy. One of the principles laid out is that anybody who is afraid to go into battle; anybody who does not want to go into the combat; and, anybody who is fearful is to be removed from the ranks. That is because a person who holds back is a threat to everybody else once you're in combat. And a person who is fearful in combat (not that you are there gungho without the concern of what may happen), cannot go into battle, realizing that he might be killed, and that he does this unto the Lord's glory, then you don't want that person in combat, because fear and a breakdown of morale spreads very rapidly under tense conditions of combat, and it's a dangerous disease.

So, the first thing the Lord said was, "I'm going to strip off 22,000. They picked up their gear and they went home. Gideon was left with 10,000. Now, he's not such a man of valor as he was before, but he's still better than he was when he had nobody.

Verse 4: "And the Lord said unto Gideon, 'The people are yet too many. Bring them down unto the water, and I will test them for you there. It shall be that whom I say into you, 'This shall go with you," the same shall go with you. Whomsoever I say unto you, 'This shall not go with you,' the same shall not go.' So, he brought down the people unto the water, and the Lord said unto Gideon, 'Everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, him you shall set by himself. Likewise, everyone who bows down upon his knees to drink,' and the number of them who lapped, putting their hand to the mouth, were 300 men. But all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink the water."

The picture seems to be here that most of the men simply reached down; leaned over to the water; and, they just drank right out of the pool of water. Whereas, 300 of them scooped the water up in their hands and they drank that way. Perhaps, this was a characteristic being revealed that they were more cautious – that they did not assume that all was well, and that they were going to even do such a thing as drink water in such a condition that they could keep an eye out for what was going on around them.

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, 'By the 300 men who lapped, I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand, and let all the other people go – every man into his place.' So, the people took provisions in their hand, and their trumpets, and He sent all the rest of Israel, every man, unto his tent, and retained those 300 men, and the host of Midian was beneath them in the valley."

So, now let's take a look at the intelligence report that comes out to Gideon as to what the status is of the battle. He has 300 men hand-picked by God. The Midianite army that Gideon faced with his 300 men totaled 135,000 strong. Those are odds of 450-to-1. And the Lord says," Now I think we have things about right for you to go into battle."

That, ordinarily, would not be viewed as the best odds – to go into battle against trained troops with 300 men does not seem to be the best odds. I would call that a condition of weakness. If there ever was anything written over this word "300," it was that – weakness. 120,000 of that 135,000 were killed in that first night when the attack was made by Gideon's 300, and then there was hot pursuit after those who were trying to flee, as several of the tribes joined Gideon's 300. So, before morning, 120,000 (and the Bible indicates that they were swordsmen) died – many of them having killed each other. Later, Gideon's 300 caught up with the other 15,000, and sent them fleeing from their camps, and in the process, they captured their kings. It was a tremendous, fantastic victory.

What a classic example! God says, "Now, I'm going to show you how I am strong. You're very powerful and you're very confident that you have all kinds of capacities, and you fall back on them, and all day long you're going into all of these things that you're able to do. You're a big mover, and a goer, and everything else, but down at the bottom line, the thing that's going to make it for you is Me. And I'm going to make it when you recognize that if I didn't give you the oxygen to breathe that next breath, you wouldn't go anywhere. If I didn't give you the physical capacity to convert the food you eat into energy to feed your brain, you wouldn't go anywhere. If I just didn't keep you functioning on a physical level so that you are rational, you couldn't do anything, let alone everything else that's involved.

So, here's the picture. They shape up for the battle. God comes up with a very interesting tactic. He says, "I want everybody of these 300 men to get a trumpet." Apparently, fortunately, they all knew how to blow it. They knew how to make a trumpet work. They're going to do a good job here. Maybe this indicates that musicians make the best soldiers. I don't know what that indicates, but I know they didn't have bugle class before this battle. I mean, I've just been going through our new beginners' class. The beginners' class procedure is going from cornets to a mellophone mouthpiece (which is a little bigger), then to a baritone mouthpiece, and seeing what they can blow and what they can't blow. Man, that is very revealing. Some kid takes up a little trumpet mouthpieces, and he doesn't do anything. I say, "Okay, now we know something about that lip and that set of teeth." Some other kid picks it up and blows a beautiful tone. My heart leaps with joy and I say, "I've got another one here." The result is that you find out that not everybody can blow.

So, these 300 men have the embouchures for blowing trumpets. The other part of the tactic was that they each had a light, and they had a cover over the light – a pitcher to hide the light. This is what you're going to battle with. Now, talking from a point of view of armament, this is real weakness. I'm going to go with 300 troops. We're going to fight 135,000, and we're going to do it with a trumpet in one hand and a light in the other hand, covered over with a pitcher so that they can't see the light. So, Gideon says, "Are you ready, men. Line up. Let me check your trumpets. Get your lips moving around here. Everybody is set here. Alright, let's take a look at you. Everybody has a light on. Keep it covered. We don't want to see the light. We're ready to go." Certainly there was a great deal of faith on the part of these 300. They must have gotten the message that their orders were coming from the Lord, and they were willing to do this.

Well, verse 16: "And he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pictures. And he said to them, 'Look on me, and do likewise. Behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that as I do, so shall you do. When I blow with the trumpet, and I and all that are with me, then blow the trumpets also, on every side of all the camp, and say, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.'" So, they have a battle cry now: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

"And Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch, and they had but newly set the watch, and they blew the trumpets and broke the pictures that were in their hands." He divided the 300 to come in on three sides of the camp. They waited for the signal from Gideon. And when it came, they suddenly blew the trumpets from all around. At the same time, they broke the pitchers so that the lights were suddenly illuminated. So, suddenly there was this illumination of light all around the camp, and these trumpets were blowing. Of course, maybe some of these people didn't know how to blow too well. That would make it even scarier. There is nothing so scary like a beginner blowing a trumpet. I can tell you that from personal experience. It is unnerving. So, here these people are blowing trumpets, and carrying these lights. The Midianites are only half-awake in this night attack: "What's going on here?"

Suddenly, the Midianites have got their head in the meat grinder, and Gideon's got a hold of the handle. "And the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands with which to blow. They cried, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.' And they set every man in his place around about the camp, and all the hosts ran and cried and fled." They didn't even move. What kind of a battle is this? They just stand there, holding up the lights, and blowing their trumpets. The charge is sounding through all over, and the Midianites are wondering, "What's going on?" Well, boy, they jumped out of their tents, and they went to charging. That's just what they did.

Unfortunately, verse 22 said that they couldn't distinguish the enemy in the dark, and it was sheer disaster: "And the 300 blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's Midianite sword against his fellow, even throughout all the hosts. Then the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, and unto Tabbath." The result was 120,000 Midianites met their end. It was sheer disaster. Out of Gideon's weakness came the marvelous strength of God. What a classic example!

But that's not all. That's only one. It is not an exception. There are some other fantastic demonstrations in the Old Testament Scriptures of weakness on our part that puts us in the position where God's power comes through. This is an historical example. This actually happened in time and space. This actually happened at a particular point in the land of Palestine at a particular time in history. God actually did this. The point that the Lord is making to the Philadelphia church is that He has a history of bringing great accomplishments out of those who are weak. Do you have the picture? That is the issue. The Lord has done for Gideon. He has done it for many who preceded us. He will do it for us.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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