

## WHY DO SOME BATTLES NEVER GO AWAY?

by Carter Conlon

Why is it some battles just never seem to go away? This is a critical question that needs to be answered. It is a question the apostle Paul undoubtedly asked himself and prayed about on many occasions, even though he was unquestionably one of our best examples of a victorious Christian. Paul had unwavering confidence in God and an unshakeable assurance that he was on the pathway of victory and truth, and he exhorted the church to follow him in the same manner in which he was following Christ. He could look back to the churches and the people he had led to the Lord, and confidently say, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Even at the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy: *"...I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:6-7). Paul knew this to be true of his life. The Holy Spirit would not have endorsed an exaggeration, an embellishment, or a lie coming from his pen. He had indeed fought a good fight, one not partial or deficient in any way. He had finished the course God had prescribed for him and had kept true to the faith.

### ■ ONGOING BATTLES

While Paul knew his life's journey was ordained of God, he also spoke of many incredible and ongoing battles which had been allowed to remain in his life. This takes us back to the question—Why do some

battles never go away even though you are following the Lord with your whole heart? Why would God allow a battle to remain in your life when He could clearly give you the victory in a moment of time? The answers begin to unfold when you read what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:7, *"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me."*

Why would God allow a battle to remain in your life when He could clearly give you the victory in a moment?

He believed his battles were there to counteract the possibility of pride forming in him because of the knowledge he had been given by God. He had been a Pharisee, and the best of them, to the point of persecuting the church of Jesus Christ. Paul had even stood and given his approval when Stephen was being stoned to death. Certainly pride is at the root of everything that exalts itself above the knowledge of God. Pride may have been inherent in Paul, and God knew there had to be something given to him to keep him in a place where his ears were open and his eyes could see where real power and real victory lay.

■ **THREE TIMES HE ASKED GOD TO REMOVE THE THORN IN HIS FLESH**  
Paul indicated that the intense

struggles he was going through caused him to go to God three times in prayer, and ask that these battles be taken from him. Now I don't believe for a moment these were casual times of prayer; they were serious and even could have involved one or two days of fasting. You can hear his cry to the Lord, saying, "God, you know I will always serve you. But a terrible battle is going on in and around me, and I'm asking you to take this away from me." The Lord responded to Paul's prayers by letting him know His grace was sufficient for him, and His strength was made perfect in Paul's weakness. God let Paul know that he would have struggles in his life, but these difficulties would never overpower him.

### ■ FIVE AREAS OF HARDSHIP

Paul identifies five areas of hardships he had to go through. *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake"* (2 Corinthians 12:10). The term *infirmities* mean bodily weaknesses and sicknesses; *reproaches* were all those insults heaped upon Paul that he had to endure. The word *necessities* refer to distresses or needs; it can also mean the old nature which fights within a man against the new nature given to him in Christ. He also speaks about *persecutions*, which means that Paul was persecuted by even his own brethren for what he stood for. And lastly, Paul talks about *distresses* or crushing afflictions,

which ordinarily would destroy a person if he did not have the resources of God sustaining him. It is important to know Paul knew he would have the victory, because God's promises would not allow him to be overcome by any of his enemies.

### ■ FIVE KINGS REMAINING IN CANAAN

You may be going through some of these same things, and you wonder why they are there. But in spite of your wondering, part of the victory you will experience begins when you understand why God has allowed them to stay in your life. There are patterns throughout the Old Testament of how God used adversity to deal with His people. Paul wrote regarding this in 1 Corinthians 10:11, *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."* We see this clearly in Judges 3:1–3, *"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath."*

In this Old Testament scripture, God is referring to five kings that were left in the land. These were not kings who had the power to defeat the people of God; they were more like nuisance kings. They were allowed by God to stay so they could prove Israel, or more clearly stated, to teach those who had not formerly experienced warfare, how to go to battle for themselves. These five kings were left, in essence, as a training ground for the Israelites to know how to rely on the strength of God as their forefathers had.

Let me give you an example. For many years I lived on a farm, and we had lots of cats in the barn. Once in a while we would see something rather humorous. The mother cat would corral a mouse out in the field and play with it until the mouse was exhausted and had no power left. The mother cat would then take the mouse to her kittens and lay it down. She wanted to teach the kittens how to conquer it. The humor of it all is that the mouse would stand up on its hind feet, bring its little claws out, show its slimy yellow teeth and try to make a noise, hoping that the kittens would not realize what they were dealing with. The only thing that kept the kittens from taking the victory was if the mouse could convince them that it was something other than what it was. The victory had been brought to the kittens; they didn't have to fight to procure it. It had been laid at their feet. This is exactly the lesson God was giving to His people through the five kings that remained in the land.

### ■ LESSONS OF OBEDIENCE AND SEPARATION

In addition to this lesson, Judges 3:4 (NLT), says, *"These people were left to test the Israelites—to see whether they would obey the commands the Lord had given to their ancestors through Moses."* These kings were to prove or test the people of God, to see whether or not they would obey Him. God wanted to know if the Israelites would stay separate. Would they be a holy people to Him? Would they be a people to whom He could point and say, these are my redeemed? These are a people who cannot be conquered; they refuse to be intermixed with the ways and the people of this world.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14–18, Paul says something very similar to us: *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? Or what communion has light with*

*darkness, and what concord has Christ with Belial, or what part has he that believes with an infidel? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? You are the temple of the living God, as God has said, I will dwell in them, and in them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* This is what God was trying to teach the Israelites in Judges chapter three and to us in Corinthians: how to fight and know victory, obey and stay a separate people unto God.

I would like to think the people of God understood why these kings were left there. The battles they faced were to prove them, to teach them how to fight and to see whether or not they would obey God in difficult times. But Judges 3:5 does not bear witness that this is what happened. Rather, it says the children of Israel dwelt among the foreign nations left in the Promised Land, where they began to intermarry and serve their gods, who were not gods at all. They then learned the ways of the people around them and did what was wrong (evil) in God's sight. Instead of standing in the midst of the battle and trusting God to give them the victory, they became focused on obtaining their own provision, and so gave in to their own sensual natures and desires.

### ■ STRUGGLES THAT MAKE YOU STRONGER

The Israelites didn't realize God had left these five kings in their midst to make them stronger. In effect, you could say that these were war games. In a time of peace, our own military forms into groups and has mock battles with one another to keep their skills sharp.



For the Israelites, these were defeated kings; they were a nuisance and an annoyance, but nevertheless they were in the land of promise. They had to be planned against and they had to be fought against, and the victory that was already theirs had to be realized. Because the Israelites failed to understand this, they in turn looked to these kings and their ways of doing things as if deliverance was going to come through their ways.

This is exactly what happens to many people who can't answer the question, "Lord, why does this battle in my life never go away?" Feeling they have not had a satisfactory answer, they become intermixed with the reasonings of people around them, and not the Word of God. They start to lose confidence in God, and begin to try to find a way out in their own strength. They have bought into a lie; they don't understand why God would allow a battle in a Christian person's life. And ultimately, they are led by their senses because they turn away from the living God. They end up back in the very things they hate. Thieves go back to stealing, immoral people go back to loose living, liars go back to not telling the truth, and fearful people go back to trepidation. And all the time they have a grievance against God, "Lord, I would not have done this if you had not allowed this battle to remain in my life." The Lord wanted to lead you to obedience and trust in Him through the battle, but you never learned what He was teaching you. Therefore, you became focused on getting your own way and your own provision.

### ■ A SCHOOLMASTER TO TEACH YOU HOW TO STAND IN ADVERSITY

Folks, do not think you will be able to stand in some great, cosmic, spiritual conflict at the end of time if you can't stand now in the little things you have to face every day. For instance, struggles that rise up in

your carnal nature that challenge the very word you received from God. Or attitudes that develop when you do not get your own way. God allows these to rise up to teach you to depend on Him and Paul understood this. He knew that even as the law was a schoolmaster that led him to the knowledge that he needed a Savior, the thorn in his flesh was also a schoolmaster which taught him to stand and not capitulate in the midst of battles that were yet to come his way.

**Ultimately, they are led by their senses because they turn away from the living God. They end up back in the very things they hate.**

Because of this understanding, Paul could glory or rejoice when people cursed him or when he suffered in his body. He could praise God because these things were defeated by the grace of God within him. "The weaker I am," Paul said, "the stronger I become." Without understanding the purpose of his thorn in the flesh, Paul could have ended up defeated in prison at the end of his days.

Could you imagine what would have happened if Paul had not lived in victory? He would not have been able to take a pen and write these uplifting words to the Ephesians: "*I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly*

*realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself*" (Ephesians 1:18-23).

Paul could say in the book of Romans that we are more than conquerors; neither death nor life nor angels nor powers, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! This is the same Paul who had a thorn in his flesh, and there is no evidence it was ever taken away from him.

### ■ GAINING A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

You too may be struggling with a thorn in your flesh and it may never go away. If you can see it in its proper perspective, it will become the very catalyst that makes you stronger. You no longer need to bend to certain behaviors or attractions that were once in your life, and are now defeated by the life of Christ within you. You have a choice not to intermix the ways of the past and the ways of God. You do not have to intermarry with these things in your life or intermingle with them. You do not need to be governed by pride or fear. You are more than a conqueror through Jesus Christ; despair and discouragement do not need to dominate your life.

Satan will tempt you to believe that if God is for you, there should be some kind of miraculous and instantaneous deliverance from a difficult situation. Not so! The only basis for victory is to stand on the Word of God and withstand the devil on the grounds of what God has

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spoken. The enemy can come against you in any way but you will not be overcome or persuaded that you are anything other than what God says you are. Paul knew in whom he believed, and was persuaded that God is able to keep what he entrusted to Him until the day He returns. For Paul, the question is settled. The enemy cannot come and persuade him any differently.

**Therefore, you have the power to condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment.**

The Bible declares you are in right standing with Christ if you have truly believed on Him and received Him as your Lord and Savior. The enemy can come against you in any way he wants, but you will not be overcome. The Lord has given you righteousness, or the right to stand before Him, that cannot be taken away. Therefore, you have the power to condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment. Yes, you have battles, but these enemies have already been overcome. It means that you are free from the dominion of sin, thanks be to God. Sin has no right to rise and govern your life anymore. You are secure! Jesus said, "You are in the Father's hand and nobody can take you out."

### ■ JESUS CHRIST, OUR GREAT DELIVERER

You might be reading this thinking your enemies are all around you, but you don't have to give yourself to them. Although the children of Israel had failed to obey and stay separate,

or even understand why these kings were allowed to be in the land, in a final desperation they did cry out to the Lord for help. You see this in Judges 3:9, "*And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them...*"

When they cried to the Lord, He gave them a deliverer. This is exactly what God wants you to do if you find yourself in similar situations or circumstances. Don't yield to the enemy, because he is already a defeated foe; yield to the Holy Spirit and He will bring you into a marvelous victory. You don't have to seek your own provision and you don't have to be given over to sensuality. You have Jesus on your side. He is a mighty deliverer who stood in the temple, opened the Bible, and said in Luke 4:18, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.*" He is your deliverer; He will give you the victory in the midst of the battle; He will give you the power to withstand your enemies.

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### TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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### WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

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