Reflections by the Pond
THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

The Enemy Without

The Enemy Within

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."

Job 1:6-7

One of the more precious passages of Scripture to any follower of Christ Jesus must be two verses found in the apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Colossae.

> For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
>
> *Colossians 1:13-14*

Think of a rushing, raging river, dark and turbulent, in which you are hopelessly trapped. The current is so strong that you cannot reach shore to save yourself. Untiringly the dark forces of this river seek to pull you under, to consume you in its watery depths. You are doomed, inexorably doomed.

The promise of God is that He, personally, has reached His hand down into that treacherous current and pulled you to safety. More than that, His rescue is permanent: This is no passing retrieval; God has literally *changed* you from one thing to another, and changed your citizenship from the domain of darkness and evil to the kingdom of His Son—the land of light, redemption, and forgiveness of your sins.

If that be true, however, how can that same apostle bewail the torment he experiences from the battle being waged within him by his opposing natures?

> For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.
>
> *Romans 7:15-25*

How can one whom God had "rescued... from the domain of darkness, and transferred... to the kingdom of His beloved Son" have experienced such sundering anguish over still-existing temptation and sin? Was Paul sanctified in Christ or not? Had the Holy Spirit taken up residence in him or not?

Here is perhaps the most persistent, troublesome quandary for the Christian: If I am "in Christ," why do I still think about, do, and even *want* to do those things that stand in opposition to Him? ●

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A Fallen Earth

News Item: Police in Cleveland, Ohio are conducting a citywide manhunt for a suspect accused of killing a man and broadcasting the murder on Facebook live. The suspect also claimed to have killed an additional 13 people. Police say the suspect, identified as Steve Stephens, posted a Facebook Live video at around 2:00 P.M. Sunday afternoon in which he shot and killed 74-year-old Robert Goodwin, Sr. The footage reportedly remained online for three hours before being deleted. The video has since been shared in other formats by users on Twitter.

News Item: Georgia Gwinnett College tried to dispel a First Amendment lawsuit by claiming that it removed a preacher from campus because his discussion of the Gospels "rose to the level of 'fighting words.'" "Plaintiff exclaimed a divisive message directly to a group of 'many' individuals while standing on top of a stool, and, in doing so, actually caused a disturbance," the motion contends, adding that the "Plaintiff used contentious religious language that, when directed to a crowd, has a tendency to incite hostility." In support of its reasoning, the school cites two previous cases in which street preachers were found to have engaged in fighting words by referring to people as "sinners."

News Item: The Islamic State terror group released a video showing the Islamic jihadis beheading 21 Egyptian Christians who were previously kidnapped in Libya. The Egyptian Copts, who were dressed in prisoner-like orange jump suits, were lined up along a beach and abruptly beheaded in the graphic five-minute video. The Islamic State's Al Hayat Media, the group that has published the previous beheading videos in the Middle East, produced the Libya video titled, "A Message Signed With Blood To The Nation Of The Cross."

"All praise is due to Allah the strong and mighty," said an ISIS jihadist dressed in military fatigues in American-accented English. "And may blessings and peace be upon the ones sent by the sword as a mercy to all the worlds," he added.

No one of reasonable intelligence can deny there is evil in this world. Headlines the world over, radio and television reports, Internet postings, and casual strolls down any Main Street dispel the tired old notion that "people are basically decent and good." No, people, and the world in which they live, are not basically good. Evil is not an aberration.

It is a constant.

But why?

From Good to Bad

As he was created, man began good. Adam, and later, Eve, enjoyed a remarkably intimate relationship with their Creator. Adam and his environment were clean and pure; sin was not present. Killing, too, was not present: humans and animals alike began, apparently, vegetarian. Only later, after the Deluge, did God give permission for Noah and his family to eat meat.

> And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant."
>
> *Genesis 9:1-3*

But Satan, in the form of a speaking serpent, injected evil into the pristine garden paradise. Man fell for his deceitful line, and fell out of grace with his Maker. In that moment man ceased to be good; he was now evil, and in opposition to God. And that evil was even transferred to the land.

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God's Idea of Good

We have no contemporary, earthly standard, or even example, of "good" as God used the term during His creating of the universe and our world.

> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
>
> *Genesis 1:31*

The venerable Old Testament commentary by Keil & Delitzsch explains that this means,

> everything perfect in its kind, so that every creature might reach the goal appointed by the Creator, and accomplish the purpose of its existence. By the application of the term "good" to everything that God made, and the repetition of the word with the emphasis "very" at the close of the whole creation, the existence of anything evil in the creation of God is absolutely denied, and the hypothesis entirely refuted, that the six days' work merely subdued and fettered an ungodly, evil principle, which had already forced its way into it.

Pastor David Guzik adds,

> When God pronounced the creation good, He really meant it. At the time, it was entirely good; there was no death or decay on earth at all.

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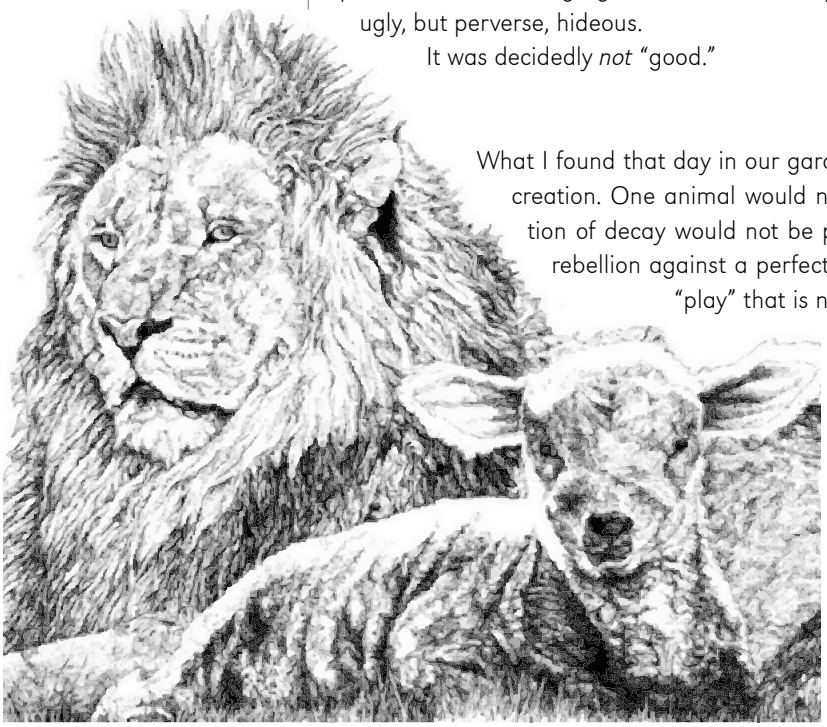
One day I set out to locate the source of a most awful stench in our garage. Eventually, by the process of elimination, I discovered the most disagreeable sight I have ever witnessed. Behind a pile of recyclables I uncovered the remains of what at one time had been a cute, white-tailed rabbit. One day our outdoor cat, Baker, had captured the bunny and, after his natural instinct, had first wounded and then played with it for a while. (To the human observer this behavior is nothing less than torture, and the accompanying squeals from the rabbit are more than tender hearts can bear.) At some point Baker had brought the wounded rabbit into the garage with the intention of making it his next meal, but the rabbit escaped beyond his reach, only there to eventually die.

Then other players in nature took over.

What lay before my eyes that day was a shapeless, black mass, liquid yet confined. It quivered and pulsated from the engorgement of hundreds, perhaps thousands of teeming maggots. It was not just ugly, but perverse, hideous.

It was decidedly *not* "good."



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What I found that day in our garage could not have existed in the early Garden of God's creation. One animal would not have killed another for food. The nauseating corruption of decay would not be present. These were and are the after-product of man's rebellion against a perfect God. Death, ugliness, decay, rot, the animal instinct of "play" that is nothing less than torture—these were never part of God's original creation.

Because it was "good."

Perhaps most people, if they even think about it at all, consider this world, this globe spinning in space, to be of a neutral constitution; it is just a fairly round chunk of matter with no definable personality or nature. Or some may be of the opinion that since it was created by God, it must be "good"—which Moses declared to be the Creator's conclusion at the time.

> God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
>
> *Genesis 1:31*

But God's word tells us that this world is very much like the humans who dwell on its surface: It began good, turned bad, and now groans under the weight of sin. Not long after God declared His creation "good," after Adam and Eve rebelled against Him, God judged all that were involved, including the land itself.

> Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying,
> 'You shall not eat from it';
> Cursed is the ground because of you;
> In toil you will eat of it
> All the days of your life."
>
> *Genesis 3:17*

And the apostle Paul describes the subsequent physical creation, the earth, in almost human terms when he writes,

> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.
>
> *Romans 8:19-22*

When man fell, the earth fell because of him. When Eve and Adam ate fruit from the forbidden "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" they initiated not just sin in themselves, but sin in every one of their offspring—that is, everyone. From this point on, every person would be born "in sin," depraved, not good. Along with that, their act of rebellion caused the earth itself to become cursed with sin.

God made His creation good, but Satan turned it bad.

Beauty and Depravity

Here is the straining, confusing dichotomy present in our world today. Leave the roaring cacophony of the city and step into nature's solitude. From the rolling waves of the endless prairie to the majestic stands of primal forest, from lilting birdsong to the rumbling purr of the feline, from the towering granite peaks of the Rockies to the magnificent sky-painting of the rising and setting sun—in all these we rightly see our God: His glory, His beauty, His generosity, His grace.

What is admittedly more difficult to see is that this same creation is as fallen as man, and is ruled over by Satan himself.

Peter Paul Rubens

> We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
>
> *1 John 5:19*

Perusing the detritus of contemporary society, the inanity, the moral depravity, the persistent cultural war against righteousness, it is easy to believe that society is indeed held fast in the clutches of the evil one. That we rightly see as society and its culture. But culture emanates from its environment, so it follows that today's deplorable culture flows out of a world environment—creation itself—that is fallen and corrupt.

Both are true. There is beauty and goodness in this world, for it is the creation of a beautiful and good God. But there is also darkness and depravity in this world, for it, along with Adam and his race, fell, and is currently in the hands of Satan.

The King of this World

Man fell. Earth fell. And evil became the default condition for both. But how is that evil sustained? What is the invisible yet deadly engine driving it all?

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There is something missing in the familiar story of Jesus' temptation by Satan, when the devil leads Him to the top of a high mountain.

> And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."

We wait for Jesus to respond with something like, *Who do you think you are? I created this world and everything in it. This is My kingdom—not yours.* But He doesn't. Instead He simply points out that Satan is no god to be worshiped.

> Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"
>
> *Luke 4:5-8*

Why doesn't Jesus dispute the claim of the impertinent Satan? Because what he said was and still is perfectly true. It all began, as did so many things, in the Garden; for his role in the fall of man, Satan was cursed.

> The Lord God said to the serpent,
> "Because you have done this,
> Cursed are you more than all cattle,
> And more than every beast of the field;
> On your belly you will go,
> And dust you will eat
> All the days of your life;
> And I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her seed.

From this point on, even though the serpent has just been cursed by God, man (the woman's "seed") will grapple with evil—both in terms of his congenital, sinful nature, and in terms of a regenerated individual's personal battles with the flesh and the depraved society in which he still dwells. The perennial struggles with sin that we all endure find their root in this cataclysmic moment in the Garden of Eden.

> "He shall bruise you on the head,
> And you shall bruise him on the heel."
>
> *Genesis 3:14-15*

God went on to promise that even though the "seed" (Christ) would one day be "bruise[d]...on the heel" (pay a physical price for redeeming man), ultimately Satan would be dealt a fatal blow "bruise[d]...on the head" by Christ Himself.

From those inaugural, fateful moments in the Garden Satan was cursed, but between then and his ultimate, tormenting demise in the lake of fire, for many thousands of years the devil will be the prince of this fallen world.

> And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.
>
> *Ephesians 2:1-2*

The Play's the Thing

There is always someone running the show. If not literally pulling the strings of the actors, there is always someone who directs the action by laying the groundwork for the play, by instilling his own personality and motives, by setting the tone of the interaction from player to player.

> *May be the devil, and the devil hath power*
> *T' assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps*
> *Out of my weakness and my melancholy,*
> *As he is very potent with such spirits,*
> *Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds*

More relative than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.
William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2

It was God the Father who set the verdict for man; because of his disobedience and rebellion, man would henceforth be alienated from God, born in sin, surrounded by sin, live in sin and, even in Christ, grapple with sin. The verdict was God's, but Satan was left as an instigator, a tempter, a teacher.

This harsh yet warranted consequence was not unlike the apostle Paul's verdict to the Corinthian church, when he learned that one of its members was sleeping with his stepmother.

> It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

As God had expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, so Paul insisted that the Corinthian church expel this man from their fellowship.

> In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus...

Both penalties reflected the mercy of a just and compassionate God, as Paul expressed it.

> I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
> *1 Corinthians 5:1-5*

Here, voiced by the apostle, is the dichotomy of our existence—both the torment and hope of even a life in Christ: We are flesh and we are spirit; though, in Christ, we have the Spirit of God within us, we remain flesh, in which is ingrained vestiges of our base, fallen nature.

And the latter is constantly being fed and directed by the king of this world. ●

> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
> *2 Corinthians 4:3-4*

Maurice Tabard, 1929

A Sojourner in Alien Territory

It is a disconcerting truth that within every believer the seeds of rebellion remain. How many among us desperately wish that God, in his salvation economy, had willed that at the moment of conversion the believing individual either lost completely the sin nature, or would be taken immediately to heaven where sin is not permitted. How much easier life would be without that nagging urge to do something we shouldn't. How much more pleasurable life would be without the persistent, never flagging temptation of the father of lies?

Alas, it *is* part of God's economy that believers remain on earth and still wrapped in flesh, susceptible to pain, sickness and disease, sorrow, temptation, and sin. He has His reasons, and they are good reasons; they are, nevertheless, hard to live with.

> For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.
>
> *Galatians 5:17*

In a Foreign Land

Many years ago, I flew from California to the Midwest on an airline that changed planes in Las Vegas. The plane ride, with its claustrophobic packing of people like sardines into the narrow tube of the fuselage, had been in itself sufficient to raise my level of anxiety. My custom on such journeys was to take every opportunity to disembark to the nearest exit, to drink in as much fresh air and open space as possible to reinvigorate myself for the next leg. On this occasion, however, I stepped off the plane and into a terminal that was a smoke-fogged den of poor souls feeding their dollars into rows of mechanical thieves—an environment no less oppressive than the interior of the airplane from which I just exited.

I suddenly felt very much alone and alienated from my normal world. The noise was deafening, the people milled about, pushing, shoving. The cigarette smoke was so heavy that I couldn't breathe. I hadn't time between planes to make it outside; somehow I would have to find a way to survive in this one, intolerable room. Looking around, I discovered that the crowd of people had not yet invaded one small area of the terminal, so I sought refuge in that out-of-the-way corner. I stood there, huddled and feeling miserable, wishing for it all to end quickly. I felt, like Elijah, surely the last sane human being in a world gone wildly insane.

In such moments the believer clings to Christ, he clings to the comforting Spirit dwelling within. Every Christian carries around with him very God in the form of His Holy Spirit, and He is a most gracious, essential gift from a loving Father.

But if we, for a moment, consider the perspective of the Spirit, we see that at all times He must surely feel as I did long ago in that smoke-filled terminal. He is and remains God, but He, like the Son while He was on earth, is living day in and day out in an utterly alien and uncomfortable environment—human flesh. The Christian has indeed been converted into a spirit-being—from flesh-kind to spirit-kind—but this new spirit-being still struggles against its own DNA, vestiges of that moment when perfect man and woman obeyed Satan rather than God. Every day for the believer is filled with the same temptation experienced by Adam and Eve that fateful day: to listen to the devil, rather than God. The Holy Spirit must live in this same environment, being bombarded daily by the adversary.

• • •

What the Christian is to the world, the Holy Spirit is to the Christian's flesh: a sojourner in alien territory. This world, as well as the flesh in which even believers must move about, remains firmly in the grasp of the evil one. It is his territory, it is his kingdom, and all who dwell here will feel his presence and his influence. ●

Greater is He

The sin nature, of which we will not be rid this side of heaven, exerts one more dispiriting influence that it intends to cap all others. It persuades us that it remains the strongest impulse, the supreme authority to which we must bow our knee in submission.

That is, of course, just another of its lies.

> "You [Jews] are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."
>
> *John 8:44*

A Precarious Balance

The Christian life is a delicate, sometimes precarious balance between acknowledging that the enemy is indeed crafty and strong, and understanding that we are in possession of someone so much stronger, so far superior, that we need not bow to the enemy's lies. For example, look what happens to Satan's strongest disciple, his right-hand man during the Tribulation, when Christ returns in judgment and power.

> Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.
>
> *2 Thessalonians 2:8-10*

The powerful Antichrist, who will have declared himself God by establishing his throne in the Jerusalem temple, and who will be ruling over the entire world will, in a moment, be slain. By vast armies of new believers rising up? By uncounted thousands of angels descending upon him? No, by "the breath" of Jesus Christ and "by the appearance of His coming." All Jesus has to do to utterly destroy someone second only to Satan in power and influence is show up!

Is Satan a formidable foe? Yes indeed—for us. The apostle Paul describes to the Ephesian church all the armor we must put on to withstand his attacks on us.

> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
>
> *Ephesians 6:10-17*

Notice that our arsenal against Satan, as delineated by Paul in Ephesians 6, consists of nothing from us, our flesh. Every weapon is from God.

We are to be "strong"—not in our own strength, but the Lord's. And the armor that will be most effective "against the schemes of the devil" is "the full armor of God."

We are to gird ourselves with truth—His truth.
We are to put on righteousness—His righteousness.
Our boots are to be the gospel of peace—Christ's gospel.
Our shield is to be faith—faith in God.
Our helmet is salvation—our salvation in Christ.
The weapon in our hand will be the word—the word of God.

Flesh alone cannot win. Supernatural power is required to win against a supernatural enemy.

But against the triune Godhead, Satan and his lower minions are little more than chaff to be burned up as waste.

For all eternity.

> And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
>
> *Revelation 20:10*

Stages

Satan and his fellow dark angels are powerful and ubiquitous, but remain utterly invisible to humans on this side of eternity. We cannot photograph them, paint their picture, or describe with certainty their wearing apparel. We know only that they are possessed of an evil that would make the triumvirate of Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot seem like a Sunday School class. They are so consumed by evil that they—who know Scripture as well as the finest biblical scholar—will not repent of it, even knowing the end God has planned for them.

> I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?
>
> *Romans 7:21-24*

Satan and his minions remain invisible, but their work here on earth is plain to see, for it is written not just in the bowels of today's nauseating popular culture, it is written in the heart of every child of Adam's race.

People do not learn evil; they are born with it, and there are only two stages of man, at best. He is born with evil in his heart, and if nothing changes, he will die with that same evil heart. The adorable face of that baby cuddled into her mother's arms masks a heart born in sin. Except for Jesus the Christ, there have been only two people not born in sin, because they were created sinless by God. But their decision that fateful day in the Garden destroyed their purity and blew it for the rest of us. From that point on, beginning with their first son, Cain, man would be born with a nature derived from the enemy of God: Satan.

For man to have a second stage to his life, there is but one way: the Holy Spirit must change the heart. The Spirit does not expunge evil from the human heart, but He comes into that grimy apartment to dwell there, and thus begin the process of cleansing that will proceed in fits and starts until bodily death. Only at that point—when the believer's spirit exits the flesh, and not before, does the human heart change completely from evil to good. Only then is Satan eradicated from the human condition.

And that is the glorious hope and promise for every follower of Christ. Because Jesus was raised from the dead—the first fruits of the dead—we too will be resurrected to new and glorified bodies.

> But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.
>
> *1 Corinthians 15:20-23*

The Imprisoned Soul

David was hiding in a cave from King Saul. He was on the run from a powerful king who wished only that this young man would, once and for all, die. For, you see, the Lord God had already expressed His displeasure with Saul, and had already anointed the new king to replace him: David, hiding in a cave. Anointed by the Lord, but not yet on the throne. King Saul wanted only to destroy this one who, in his eyes, was nothing more than a usurper of power.

So, stuck in a cave, the future king cries out to his God. Does he ask the Lord to save his skin, his life? Does he ask the Lord to send down fire from heaven on those pursuing him? No, his concern is for his spirit, and his soul.

> I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord;
> I make supplication with my voice to the Lord.
> I pour out my complaint before Him;
> I declare my trouble before Him.
> When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,
> You knew my path.
> In the way where I walk
> They have hidden a trap for me.
> Look to the right and see;
> For there is no one who regards me;
> There is no escape for me;
> No one cares for my soul.
>
> *Psalms 142:1-4*

When we are being pursued by the evil one, when we are alone and full of fear, we feel it down to our very soul. But we have a God who knows; His Spirit connected to ours, He knows the straits we are in. And

when those who surround us care nothing for our soul, our God does.

> I cried out to You, O Lord;
> I said, "You are my refuge,
> My portion in the land of the living.
> Give heed to my cry,
> For I am brought very low;
> Deliver me from my persecutors,
> For they are too strong for me.
> Bring my soul out of prison,
> So that I may give thanks to Your name;
> The righteous will surround me,
> For You will deal bountifully with me."
>
> *Psalms 142:5-7*

The cry of every human being on the face of this earth should be, "Bring my soul out of prison!" Every person is born behind bars. We are not born good and innocent, then turn bad as we grow up because of external influences. No, we are born depraved and locked inside the prison built by the lord of all flesh: Satan. We come into this world his, and, whether we realize it or not, it is a miserable existence.

But Christ holds the key to that prison. Those who call upon Him, who place their faith and trust in Him, are released from that dank and dispiriting dungeon.

Still, so long as those believers remain on earth, remain in flesh, they remain, in a sense, imprisoned. The oppressive culture of this earth—composed and conducted by the father of lies—still bears down upon those in Christ; just like David, Christians are every day surrounded by the enemy's minions seeking to ridicule, harass and persecute those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. So the cry of every child of God in Christ should also be, "Father God, Bring my soul out of prison!"

But there is one more reason for that cry to be on our lips, for there is one more kind of prison beyond the prisons of original sin and persecution. That prison is self.

There are no prison bars more lamentable than the bars we erect ourselves. These keep us from the full glories available to us in Christ. They keep us from the fullness of His presence, His influence, His grace. They effectively lock away His Spirit, that tender comforter yearning to minister to ours even as we ignore Him.

Whenever it becomes necessary, our cry should be, "Lord Jesus, bring my soul out of prison!" ●

Carl Stevens

> For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh 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 cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.
>
> Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.
>
> *Romans 8:6-10, 1-2.*

> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.
>
> *1 John 4:1-4*