

# The Church Militant

By  
Robert M. HANLIN

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**THERE** is no safer place to be than in Jesus. And if we are "in Jesus" now, and keep true to the end, we shall be with Him forever. Let us turn to I Corinthians 15:50-58:

**"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.**

**"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,**

**"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

**"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

**"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.**

**"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**

**"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.**

**"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:50-58).**

That is the wonderful hope that many of us have this morning. It is good to have the Word of God in our heart and to hide it there. The Psalmist said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). That Word can be the lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Paul, in his writings, gives us some wonderful words of instruction; he wrote them with love and encouragement. Thank God, we can find that same feeling of encouragement in God's Word. We are in the Church Militant, fighting the good fight of faith, and we have the confidence the Lord will bring us through victoriously.

When reading one of our publications the other afternoon, I came upon this thought:

One of the great theologians of the church in the past century was being disciplined by his superior because he dared to take a stand for some principle that the superior denied. The superior, denouncing this child of God said, "I hereby separate you from the Church Militant." Acting in real Christian grace, the Christian replied, "That you may feel you can do, but one thing is sure and certain: you can never separate me from the Church Triumphant."

We can look forward to that day when we will be a part of the Church Triumphant. Today we are the Church Militant, fighting in a battle. We have a Captain who has never lost a battle. When we put our trust in the Lord and keep Him as our Captain, Savior and Leader we are going to be victorious. Thank God, one of these days we shall become the Church Triumphant!

The battles that we fight are hazardous. The outcome will mean eternal life or death. This Christian battle is a fight for eternal life. We do not want to underestimate the enemy, the devil. We are not going to give him any glory, but we have to recognize that he is the enemy whom we are fighting. Our doctrines have to do with equipping ourselves, as children of God, for the battle we are in caused by problems that come into our lives.

We read about Caleb, who in his latter days, at the age of 85, went to Joshua and asked for his

inheritance, the mountain where the giants were. He said:

**"As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in.**

**"Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day . . . if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said" (Joshua 14:11,12).**

As Christians, we are in a continuous battle. I believe that God would have us to be on the offensive, always ready to meet the enemy and not wait until he strikes the first blow.

We don't want to go around with a sob story, telling people what a hard time we are having. We can have the victory just as the children of God had whom we read about in the Bible, who went through battles victoriously when they kept their trust and confidence in the Lord.

Let us turn to the Book of Nehemiah.

**"So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. "And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.**

**"And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire" (Nehemiah 2:11-13).**

This was a serious problem! The gates of the City of Jerusalem had been destroyed and God had called Nehemiah to go and rebuild them. Nehemiah was not a building contractor. We read in the Bible that he was a cup-bearer before the king. But God had called him to go and rebuild the walls of the city, and the gates thereof.

Israel was in Babylonian captivity but God was going to reestablish those people in their homeland. God had given Ezra the call to rebuild the house of worship, and now the city walls had to be rebuilt. Nehemiah found much to discourage him, and you will, too, when you start working for the Lord. You will find opposition all along the way, but you can overcome by the help of God.

The ministers often instruct us and encourage us — even call us to a time of prayer — telling us it is not going to be an easy way. "You're not going to be carried around on a cushion: there is a battle ahead. We want you to know this — not to scare you away but to get you equipped to fight the battle."

For a while it may seem as if everything is going fine and working well, but all at once here comes the opposition, sometimes from unexpected avenues. For example: I remember one young man who became a Christian who had been an alcoholic. When he had been in the drinking stupors he hadn't been too kind to his family, his wife and daughters. But he gave his heart and life to God, and of course God cleaned up that life. And he started cleaning up his home, and being good to his family.

"We're not going to have any more of that in the house," he told his wife, as he took the beer out of the refrigerator. You would have thought she would have been happy about that, but she opposed it. "No beer? We've always had it." She was serious as she said, "If there is no beer, I won't stay here." And she walked out on him. Divorced him. He remained a Christian. He won that battle.

Opposition comes but there is grace to meet every problem and every trial. In order to be a part of that Church Militant with the hope of someday being a part of the Church Triumphant we're going to have battles and see victories won so that we can gain the crown that is laid up for us Over There.

Let us read more about Nehemiah:

**"But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" (Nehemiah 2:19).**

And later:

**"But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.**

**"And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive**

**the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" (Nehemiah 4:1,2).**

Opposition! They were laughed at, mocked. This comes to us, too, as we endeavor to work for God. People may mock us. We are a peculiar people, different. We know that. But what are they really mocking? They mock that inner spirit, and endeavor to demoralize us, make us feel it is not necessary to take the stand that we do. The Lord has given us the standard we have in our hearts, and by the grace of God, we will stand by it. God will help us. If God be for us, who can be against us? The Lord has promised that not one thing will come our way but that He will give the grace and strength to bear it. Stand on the promises of God. Stand on the Word of God. That Word never fails.

**"Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Nehemiah 4:3).**

When we were out on board the Enterprise during World War II, some used to talk about "dive bomber religion," the religion that you have just when you get into a problem or a tight place, or when the bombs are falling. Well, some of the fellows did have that kind of religion. But there were others of us who kept the victory from there on out.

We know that there are some people who have a "camp meeting religion." They make a good show of piety when everyone around them is rejoicing and in agreement, but when they get out by themselves, they let it slip. God wants us to get something in our heart that is deeper than that, something that will endure the testing.

That so-called "dive bomber" religion that I found back in 1942 is still in my heart today in 1985. And it is just as real to me today, and even more so, because I've seen God win battle after battle and give me victory after victory because I put my trust in Him. It is nothing that I have done myself, no greatness of my own, not my own strength, but because I kept my hand in God's hand He kept me true. He has given me the victory that I needed in the battles.

Yes, there's been mockery. They used to call those of our Bible class "preacher" or "deacon." "There goes the deacon"; "There goes the preacher." I've had some of those same men come by when the crowd was gone and they'd say, "Would you pray for us — I got a letter from home and they have a problem. Would you pray for us?"

Yes, they may ridicule, but down underneath they know who has the truth. We can be that Church Militant today, and come through with victory. The Lord gives us an armor, and we want to use it for Him. "Put on the whole armour of God," the Bible tells us. The armor the Lord gives us is all for the offensive — nothing for the back. There is the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit; but it is all for the front. We are in an offensive stage where we are out to defeat the devil and hold true to the very end.

What did Nehemiah do when oppositions came? Read the next verse:

**"Hear, O our God. . ." (Nehemiah 4:4).**

He took it to God. He started to pray. He took the problem where the problem should go. You know, it is our problem until we pray about it; then it becomes God's problem. We just lay it out before Him.

There was a time when a very discouraging message came to Hezekiah, King of Judah. Sennacherib was threatening to take Judah captive. What did Hezekiah do about it? He took the letter to the house of God and spread it out before the Lord. Then he prayed, and he asked the Prophet Isaiah to pray. He put the battle into the hands of the Lord. And what happened? When Sennacherib's army camped against Jerusalem, "the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses" (Isaiah 37:36). One hundred and eighty-five thousand men slain in one night by the angel of the Lord! Hezekiah had put the battle into the hands of the Lord because he knew God would give him victory.

Can we trust the Lord today? Certainly we can. We have heard many testimonies during this camp meeting of miracles and victories that have been won by the Lord. What God does for one, He will do for another. If you have a problem in your life, God will solve it too, if you put it into His hands.

Sometimes some of our problems look nearly insurmountable to us, but God knows. God cares. There is

victory in Jesus!

It is not wrong to pray on the run. Sometimes we have to do that. But we want to make sure that we are prayed up before we start running. We don't want to wait for the problem to come before we start to pray through. The 16th verse of the 4th chapter of Hebrews says:

**"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."**

Go to that Throne of Grace before you have the heavy battle. Get yourself equipped. Feel in your heart that you can get the armor that God has for you. Too often we wait until we get into the battle, then we start praying. By the grace of God, we have to continue to be prayed up so that when the battles and problems come, we are ready to meet them. That is what it means to be in the Church Militant. We are always in readiness. We always feel that we are ready to fight the good fight of faith.

We may have our emotional ups and downs because of physical feelings or various situations, but in spite of all that, in our heart we can pray without ceasing; we can rejoice evermore, in everything give thanks. We can have that confidence that God is still on His Throne, that He knows what is before us and is going to give us the strength and the courage to meet it. So we come to Him boldly. We lay the petitions out before Him and seek His help in time of need. We ask Him for the mercy that He alone can give. But we must do this before we come into the heat of the battle. In our own home or wherever we are, we must keep prayed up. Keep alert. Be in readiness.

There were times while on board ship that we didn't know when the general quarters buzzer was going to sound — when the enemy was actually going to be there to meet us head-on — but we always had to be alert. And that's what we have to do as Christians. We must keep in readiness to meet the enemy until the moment when the Lord sounds the Trumpet and we go to be with Him. Until that time, we will still be fighting, laboring and overcoming our problems by the grace of God. Boldly we come to the Throne of Grace.

In Romans 8:1 we read:

**"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."**

The Church Militant is walking after the Spirit, with no condemnation in the heart. It is a church without spot or wrinkle. If your heart condemns you not, you can ask what you will, and the Lord will answer you. But if there is condemnation in your heart, it breaks down that relationship between you and God.

As we follow the Lord, as we walk in the Spirit of God, He leads and guides us. He knows all about the battles that are out there, the things that we are confronting. And yet in His own plan, He has so ordained it that we must ask Him for strength. He wants us to ask Him for the direction and courage to continue on fighting and laboring for Him.

I think of the time when the Children of Israel were being pursued by the enemy as they came out of Egypt. They came to the Red Sea, and the sea was before them and the mountains on each side of them. What did the Lord say? "Go forward." There is no standing still in the Gospel. We have to continue to go forward with the Lord. Often we hear people say, "I'm saved, sanctified, and have my baptism. I have 'all my experiences.' " No, you haven't really. You just have a good start, the equipment with which to start fighting.

I've often said that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is just a springboard to get you out into the battle, and you're going to find more experiences out there, experiences God gives. He will lead and direct you and give you the victory. If there is no condemnation in your heart, you can ask and God will give.

Sometimes people feel that they don't want to bother God with everything. The big problems they can take to Him and believe He will help them through. They pray about those. But they just don't want to bother God with the little things. Somehow they feel that they can work them out or handle them themselves. This isn't true. God wants us to take everything to Him. It's those little "termites" sometimes that ruin things, those little things that we try to do in our own strength, with our own courage, without God's help and grace. God has strength for us. God has the way that we can win. Listen to this Scripture:

**"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let**

**your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6).**

He just wants us to take everything to Him. Be careful for nothing. Don't let those little things slip in and rob you of the victories that God has for you.

**"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).**

As you take these "everything's" to Him and lay them all out before Him, the peace that God gives is going to be yours. There is strength and victory in keeping the Lord as your Captain.

I love to read about the victories Nehemiah had. I have found courage and strength in seeing how this man kept his confidence in God. After all of the oppositions of the people, he said:

**"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them" (Nehemiah 4:9).**

This is what we have to do. We have to set a watch against these things and we do this through prayer, through the reading of the Word. The Bible says that when the devil comes in, the Lord will raise a standard, but the standard has to be in our heart before the Lord can raise it. We find this standard by reading the Word and through prayer. And this is what Nehemiah was saying: ". . . we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them. . . ." He knew that the enemy was there so he set a watch against them.

Nehemiah had to change his plan of building somewhat. Going down to the 16th verse, it says:

**"And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah."**

They worked, but they also kept their weapons with them. Sometimes we feel if we ignore the problem, it may go away, but it won't. It's going to be there. Sometimes people have the feeling, if they get saved from sin they will be saved from all battles. Not so. They still will have problems and battles. Sin and the desire for sin will be gone, but the battles will continue. But we will have the Lord's help in fighting them.

Faith does not save us from the battles, but it does prepare us to face them and fight them. Nehemiah met this opposition through getting these people prepared for the battle. We read:

**"They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon."**

**"For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me" (Nehemiah 4:17,18).**

The difficulty was there, but he kept building. He didn't give up or compromise. Finally the walls were finished.

Sometimes young people, when going to school, have struggles because of the opposition that they get from those who are not saved. The devil tells them, "You'd just as well give up, quit your stand. You'd just as well join the gang, join the groups." Why should they turn their back on God like that? That is what they are doing if they heed Satan's temptation. And after the Lord had saved them and given them victories! Why turn back now?

Sometimes on your job somebody else's getting a promotion may make you envious, or maybe your vacation time doesn't work out just right and you get upset. These are battles that we have to go through. These are some of the hard things that we meet from time to time. But as we take them to God, He gives us the victory over them; and as we get the victory over them we become stronger. Stronger for what? The next battle that is going to come. And it will come, but one of these days we're going to be changed. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump . . . the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Corinthians 15:52). No longer the Church Militant. No longer the church that is fighting. We shall have fought the battles and overcome. After we have run the race, followed the Lord, we shall be changed. We are going to be the Church Triumphant. We are going to be the Church that will spend eternity with Christ.

We read in Mark 13:13: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." By the grace of God, we want to endure to the end. We're running the race today. We're in the battle now. We're fighting with everything we have and with the weapons that God gives us, but as we endure to the end we shall be saved. We shall be with our Lord and Savior forever and ever. If the battle really seems to be hard — it does get hard sometimes — just keep your eyes on Jesus, our Captain Keep your eyes on the Leader. He'll never fail you. He'll take you through.

We may not understand why the deep waters today but someday we shall understand. We have the opportunity now to pray, to take our burdens to Jesus, to lay our all out before Him. Of the problems, burdens, whatever it might be that we are carrying, we can say, "God, give me grace, give me strength. Help me, Lord, to hold on because victory will soon be here, I know. I am putting my trust and confidence in You." If we have that faith the Lord will honor it and answer our prayers.