



What is Your Battle Strategy?

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:13–16, KJV 1900)

When people are faced with intense trials, they often react with fear, at times paralyzing fear. They withdraw into an emotional cocoon and hide in their private little world, hoping the problem will simply go away. But real problems in our real world do not go away. They grow worse, not better. Another common reaction to intense difficulties is to act in unwise and unhealthy ways to the problem. I recall more than one person during my business career who reacted to problems on the job with "I need a drink," and he wasn't talking about water. If a person hides in alcohol from his problems, he doesn't solve the problem; he pickles it in the alcohol.

Peter begins his letter to suffering Christians with a reminder of the goodness and power of God. With that foundation in place, he now will admonish them to an active engagement of godly faith and action. The actions that Peter admonishes cultivate a right attitude and trust in God, and they also require us to make our conduct follow God's commandments to us, not become reactive to the trial.

Active Christian conduct is a dominant theme of Scripture. Without question, the most important theme of Scripture is the Lord and what He has revealed in Scripture of Himself, His nature, His character, and His work. However, if you were to segregate the Scriptures into the various themes that appear in them, the largest portion of Scripture deals with how God commands us to conduct our lives so that what we do glorifies Him for His gracious benefits to us. (Psalm 116:12)

Given the brokenness of our world and our empathy to it, we should not be surprised to observe that the nature of Christian conduct is one of the most controversial topics among Christians. Consider just a few of the unbiblical attitudes that believers adopt regarding the reason, motive, and outcomes of conduct among believers.

1. **Motive.** Do you do good works to gain eternal life and final acceptance with God? Perhaps the most common errant idea, Scripture makes a point of addressing this idea and rejecting it. (Titus 3:1-7) Quite common under this general heading is the question: What constitutes "works"? The

dominant idea in our day is that certain behaviors constitute works, but one's faith or belief in God is not a work. Therefore, supposedly, requiring an unregenerate sinner to believe in God, to have faith in Him, is not really a form of salvation by works. Jesus makes a point of addressing and rejecting this idea. (John 6:27-29) Do not overlook Jesus' specific response to the question, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God"? Their question grew out of Jesus' words in Verse twenty-seven. Notice Jesus' words in answer to their question, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Thus, based on Jesus' personal words, belief is a work that a child of God can—and should—do to honor God in his/her life. This belief becomes the foundation for the Biblical motive for all good works. (1 Corinthians 6:20) It is not a fallen sinner's step to eternal life, but it is the redeemed sinner's path to glorifying God in his/her life.

2. **Ability.** Based on Scripture's teachings, the unregenerate person lacks the ability to do anything whatever of a spiritual nature to please God. However, the teachings of Scripture on the effects of the new birth, coupled with perhaps more than ninety percent of the Bible that instructs those who believe in God regarding what they should do, remind us that the new birth indeed alters a person's moral compass, desires, and ability. One must irresponsibly wrest the Scriptures to the point of eisegesis (Pouring one's ideas into the Bible, and then claiming that the idea came from the Bible, rather than exegesis, going to the Bible for our ideas and drawing what we believe from the Bible) to miss this central point of Scripture's teachings regarding the regenerate person's new, spiritual desires and ability. A minor view that occasionally appears denies any change of character, nature, and ability in the new birth and claims that the born again person is fully as incapable and disinclined to do anything godly as he/she was prior to the new birth.

The conclusion of this idea regarding belief and godly behavior contradicts the teachings of Scripture and makes God into a cosmic puppeteer who pulls your strings to cause you to do anything good or godly. The idea falls before Scripture's teachings regarding God's moral government of the universe, as well as several other points of failure, a point that Paul powerfully makes in Romans 3:1-9. A puppeteer is responsible for the conduct of the puppet, so, if the puppet does something bad, the puppeteer is at fault. For a puppeteer to command a puppet to do something is a deceitful charade, so the dominant appearance of commandments from God to His people in Scripture wholly refutes this errant idea. Often advocates of this error will attempt to evade this point by saying that we sin when "...left to ourselves." However, the idea obviously contradicts the teachings of Scripture regarding the changes that God makes in a person in the new birth, and it likewise ignores over ninety percent of the Bible that consistently commands the child of God to think and to do certain things to glorify God, something a helpless puppet cannot do. More deadly to the idea is the fact that it offers no rational explanation for this mystical "Left to ourselves" cycle. If God knows that, "Left to ourselves," we can only sin, and He nevertheless so leaves us, God is morally responsible for our sins, something that Scripture addresses and emphatically refutes. Perhaps this idea attempts to set itself as a polar opposite to the Arminian notion of salvation by works, but it fails to grasp that neither of two extremes typically state truth. Scripture's truth refutes both ideas, and it affirms a moral, God-glorifying, active Christian conduct that has no fellowship with either idea.

3. **Purpose.** What is the purpose of active, Biblical, godly Christian conduct? This point touches the first idea of motive, but goes further. Even believers who sincerely think that they do not believe in any form of salvation by works often indirectly associate their present Christian behavior with some form of reward or degree of honor for themselves in heaven after death. They struggle intensely with the idea that glorifying God by what we think and do is a sufficient motive and/or purpose for godly living. To such an attitude, I would ask, "What better motive and purpose could you possibly have for godly living?"

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.... The Christian life is not an entertaining game to be approached with

one's personal victory or benefit as the objective. It is a battle in which the faithful believer often engages his Captain's adversaries in combat. The Captain sets the battle strategy and gives His soldiers the commands for victory. The soldier who enters the battlefield undressed for battle is a sure loser against a fierce and vicious enemy. To gird one's loins calls up the image of a soldier putting on his armor in preparation for battle. (Ephesians 6:11-20, especially Verse fourteen, "...having your loins girt about with truth...") The loins of one's body likely refer to the mid-section of the body. Since Paul's analogy of armor covers the chest cavity with the "...breastplate of righteousness," the section of the body from the chest to the top of the legs seems to be the logical section intended by "loins." This section of the human body contains vital organs for survival. It must be vigorously protected, or the soldier will quickly die from wounds to the area.

Peter associates loins with the mind in our study passage. An unprotected mind is Satan's favorite spot to attack to destroy a weak believer. How easily our minds allow bad ideas to invade our hearts and to compromise our spiritual perspective. Satan has a broad array of weapons that he loves to use on the mind. Perhaps his favorite weapon is pride. He can make you think that you are better, wiser, more righteous, or in any number of ways superior to your brothers and sisters in the church. If he succeeds, you begin to look down on them, not submit to them as Paul commands. (Ephesians 5:21) Paul includes a warning that no man should be ordained to the ministry who is a novice in the faith, one young and not yet strongly established. Why? The inexperienced and unlearned novice is vulnerable to Satan's weapon, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:6 KJVP) Notice how pride in the novice leads the naïve young person in the faith directly into pride. Novice pride typically convinces the young, not-yet-established believer to think that he knows more than those old, seasoned saints around him, believers who may be more cautious and reserved about their knowledge and ability than he. He loves to get around them, raise some of their old and challenging questions, and then tell them how he has their problem all worked out. He thinks that he has figured out what they were too ignorant to know, so pride takes over his mind. Little does this naïve person know that his proud state of mind is Satan's favorite and most vulnerable attack-point. The poor soul is ill prepared for the crash that soon follows his burst of pride. Once Satan convinces the inexperienced novice that he knows more and is a better preacher or disciple than his peers, he knows that he has succeeded. The next event that surely follows in this person's life could not be more accurately described than Paul's words, "...fall into the condemnation of the devil."

...*be sober...* adds to the image. Intoxication from any source warps one's sense of propriety and

responsible action. It nurtures extreme and irrational reactions to problems. It also nurtures the Garden of Eden "Blame-someone-else" mind set. The problem is always what someone else thinks or does, not what the individual does. To be sober means that we avoid extreme and intoxicating ideas that lead us to pride or to other irresponsible reactions to the trials of the Christian warfare.

...hope to the end.... Hope is not a momentary or temporary state of mind that we are to embrace when everything is going our way. It shines brightest when our world is at its darkest. The three behaviors that Peter here commands are crucial to the struggling or suffering Christian. Embrace a permanent mindset that anchors its attention on God and not self. Avoid extremes in belief, in action, and avoid the people who encourage them. And keep your heart and mind focused on the Lord Jesus Christ who "...is our hope...." (1 Timothy 1:1)

All three of these behaviors require that we look past the problem of the moment, whatever that problem is, and keep our hearts focused on "...the God of hope...." (Romans 15:13) Whatever the trial, the persecution, He is greater, and His leadership will guide us through the danger to safety and victory by His side. Are you willing to stop following yourself? Are you ready to stop doing nothing? Are you willing, truly willing, to "*...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end...*"? If so, the joys of fellowship with the Lord await you on the other side of your trial. If not, you may well spend the rest of your life wallowing in self-inflicted defeat and thinking only of the pain of the trial. The choice, as well as the outcome, is just that dramatic. Which do you choose? Will you obey the Lord's commandments that Peter gives to us? Or will you choose to enter the certain battle ahead with your own armor and your private battle strategy?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor