



Christian Maturity Series

Last of Five Lessons

5. THE SPOILS OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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February 24, 2003

“Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 26:27). This verse opens us to a profound, life-changing truth. It speaks of spoils that can only be won in battle. And once these spoils are won, they’re dedicated to the building up of God’s house.

I believe if we grasp the powerful truth behind this verse, we’ll understand why the Lord allows intense spiritual warfare throughout our lives. Many Christians think once they’re saved, their struggles are over, that life will be smooth sailing. Nothing could be further from the truth. God not only allows our battles, but he has a glorious purpose for them in our lives.

So, what are “spoils of warfare”? Spoils are plunder, loot, goods taken in battle by the victors. The Bible first mentions spoils in Genesis 14, when a confederation of kings invaded Sodom and Gomorrah. These invaders captured the inhabitants and plundered their possessions: “They took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah...and they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son” (Genesis 14:11-12).

When Abram learned his nephew Lot was taken captive, he gathered his 318-man army of servants and pursued the enemy kings. Scripture says he overtook the invaders and “smote them...and he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people” (14:15-16).

Picture victorious Abram here. He was leading a long procession of joyful people, and wagon loads piled high with goods of all kinds. And along the way, he met Melchizedek, king of Salem. Scripture tells us Abram was moved to tithe to this king of all his plunder (see 14:20). “Consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (Hebrews 7:4).

What an amazing scene. God’s chosen servant had just won a great victory, and now he presented a portion of all his spoils to a king. Why? Melchizedek was “the priest of the most high God” (Genesis 14:18). Abram clearly gave this tithe for the purpose of maintaining the ministry of God’s house.

Now, try to imagine the scene just a few hours before Abram overcame those invaders. Satan must have been gloating. His armies had just carried away the entire populations of two cities, including the one godly man who lived there. Righteous Lot was the only person who could have challenged the devil’s control over those cities. But now Satan had taken Lot as spoil, along with vast herds of cattle, wagon loads of food and clothing, and chests full of gold, silver and precious stones.

I can picture the devil boasting over his capture of Abram’s seed: “Look at Lot. He’s bound in chains, stripped of all his goods. That’s what happens to anybody who tries to interfere in my territory.”

Yet, now imagine the scene after Abram’s victory. The confederated army had gotten stuck in slime pits and were soundly defeated. And Abram had freed the people and recovered a massive caravan of spoils. These goods weren’t just from Sodom and Gomorrah, but also from nine other cities that had been plundered. Sodom’s spoil was given back, down to the last shoelatch. But the spoil of the invaders was kept by Abram.

Here is the principle God wants us to lay hold of: Our Lord is interested in much more than making us victors. He wants to give us spoils, goods, spiritual riches from our warfare. We're to emerge from battle with wagon loads of resources. This is what Paul refers to when he says, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37, italics mine).

All the spoils gained in battle are dedicated to maintaining God's temple.

David had the same reverent attitude toward spoils taken in warfare. We see it in a decree he set forth toward the end of his life. David had just appointed his son Solomon to follow him on Israel's throne. And now he gathered the nation's leaders together, to set up a divine order for sustaining God's house. What resources would they use for this holy work? "Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 26:27).

Let me set the scene. After every military victory, David took back spoils and stockpiled them in abundance: gold, silver, brass, timber, money too vast to count. And he had one purpose in mind: to use these spoils as resources for building the temple.

Meanwhile, David appointed temple offices to priests, porters, singers, musicians, stonemasons, craftsmen, skilled workers for everything needed to maintain God's house. Then David set up a special treasury to provide exclusively for the temple's maintenance, once it was established. And he directed his captains to bring forth all the spoils of war, to supply this treasury.

When Scripture speaks of maintaining the temple, the original Hebrew means "to repair the house, to strengthen and consolidate what was built." In short, these resources were meant to maintain the temple's original splendor. They were designated for the repair of any decay, to keep God's house in pristine condition.

So, you ask, where is God's temple today? It's made up of his people - you, me, his church worldwide. According to Paul, our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. And, like ancient Israel, our Lord still maintains his temple through spoils gained in battle. That's why our trials are meant for more than just our survival. Through every battle, God is laying aside riches, resources, wealth for us. He's stockpiling a whole treasury of goods from our warfare. And those spoils are dedicated to building up and maintaining his body, the church of Jesus Christ.

Think about it: for years after Solomon built the temple, it was maintained in good order by the spoils taken in past wars. God's house remained vibrant and alive, because his people had emerged from every conflict not just victorious, but rich in resources.

We find this principle of "supply through battle" throughout God's Word.

1. David's life offers an example of God's purpose for us in taking spoils.

While David and his army were away, the Amalekites raided his village of Ziklag. These marauding invaders took all the women and children and burned down the whole town. When David returned, he “was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him...but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God” (1 Samuel 30:6).

Talk about spiritual warfare. This wasn’t just an attack against David. It was an all-out assault against God’s eternal purpose. Once again, the devil was after God’s seed. We know the prophesied Messiah was to come through David’s descendants. And now Satan had taken away every woman and child through whom that seed might come.

Beloved, this is the focus of all spiritual warfare: the enemy has always been determined to destroy the seed of Christ. And that fact hasn’t changed, even 2,000 years after the Cross. Satan is still out to destroy God’s seed. And he does this by attacking us, the seed of Christ, and scheming to remove our testimony.

David felt threatened when he heard the grumbling of his men. They wanted to stone him for leaving the women and children vulnerable. But David knew his heart was right with God, and Scripture says he encouraged himself in the Lord. Immediately, this man of faith took off in pursuit of the Amalekites. And he quickly overtook them, rescuing every person and possession that had been taken: “David recovered all” (1 Samuel 30:19). He and his men lost nothing, “neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them” (30:19). All told, they weren’t even missing a bag of beans.

Yet the Amalekites had plundered other towns also. So David took all those spoils into his possession as well: “David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drave before those other cattle, and said, This is David’s spoil” (30:20).

Like Abram, David was more than a conqueror. He did more than simply survive and break even. That’s because God had more in store for David than a testimony of victory. When this man returned with his family, he also had with him huge herds of sheep, goats, camels and cattle, as well as wagon loads of silver, gold, jewelry, garments and household items.

What did David do with all these spoils of war? He used them to maintain the purposes of God. David knew God had anointed him to be king over the people. And now he had to repair the damage done to his reputation. So he sent spoils to those who had been alienated from him, seeking to unite God’s people: “He sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah...saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord” (30:26). David also sent spoils to every town where he and his men had been hiding,...and to them which were in Hebron” (30:31). Eventually, Hebron would be the city that brought David to his kingship.

Here is yet another example of God’s purpose in our spiritual warfare. We’re to take spoils from battle not just for ourselves, but for the body of Christ. The resources we gain are meant to bring blessing to others.

In David’s case, God was also maintaining his house by preserving his seed. David would provide the lineage leading to Christ. Yet, up to that point, David was seen throughout the land as a fugitive. He had constantly been on the run, faced with crisis after crisis, on the

brink of losing everything. But now these spoils — herds of livestock and wagon loads of gifts - proved David was a victorious warrior. He came out of his battles rich with resources. And those resources provided for God's continued work.

2. God's people took spoils in a miraculous way in 2 Kings 6.

In this passage, the Syrian army besieged the city of Samaria during a famine. The Syrians simply camped outside the city, waiting for the Samaritans to starve. Conditions got so bad within the city walls, a donkey's head sold for eighty pieces of silver. People grew desperate, including two mothers who agreed to boil their baby children and eat them. After they ate the first baby, however, the second mother backed out and hid her child. So the bereaved mother went to the king to complain that her friend wasn't sharing. It was sheer insanity.

Four lepers who lived outside the city walls finally said to themselves, "Why sit here until we die?...Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2 Kings 7:3-4). So they set out for the Syrian camp.

When they arrived, everything was deathly still. Not a soul was in sight. So they searched every tent, but everyone was gone. Scripture explains: "The Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittities, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses...even the camp as it was, and fled for their life" (7:6-7).

When the lepers realized this, they went from tent to tent, eating and drinking to the full. Then they loaded their arms with gold, clothes and other goods, and hid them away. Finally, they went back to the city gate and called out to the porter, "Come with us. You won't believe it, but the Syrians have fled their camp. It's a ghost town now."

Scripture says, "The people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel" (7:16). Once again, God's people emerged more than conquerors. Satan had tried to starve them to death. But the Lord turned the whole situation around. He took the spoils of warfare and used them to restore and refresh his people, maintaining his cause on earth.

Are you getting the picture? Are you beginning to understand the reason for your present battle? Those who put their trust in the Lord are promised glorious victory over all power of the enemy. God wants you to know, "Yes, you'll come through victorious. But I'm going to make you more than an overcomer. I'm working out an even greater purpose in you, for my kingdom. You'll come out of this battle with more spoils than you can handle."

Paul describes this when he writes, "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

3. We find a third purpose for taking spoils in the story of Esther.

Here is a story of intense warfare, one of the greatest spiritual battles in all of Scripture. Again, the devil was trying to destroy God's purpose on earth, this time through the evil Haman. This wealthy, influential man persuaded the king of Persia to declare an edict calling for the death of every Jew under his rule, from India to Ethiopia.

The first Jew in Haman's sights was righteous Mordecai, Esther's uncle. Haman had a gallows built especially for Mordecai. But Esther intervened, calling God's people to prayer and laying her life on the line to countermand Haman's order. God exposed the wicked scheme, and Haman ended up hanging on his own gallows. And the king not only reversed the death order, but he gave Haman's house to Esther, an estate worth millions by today's standards.

Yet Haman's mansion wasn't the only spoil taken in this story. Scripture tells us, "The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour" (Esther 8:16). These were the true spoils gained in battle with the enemy.

You see, our trials not only gain us spiritual riches. They keep us strong, pure, under continual maintenance. As we put our trust in the Lord, he causes our trials to produce in us a faith more precious than gold (see 1 Peter 1:7).

4. The greatest spoil of all took place at the Cross.

"Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

Jesus plundered the devil at Calvary, stripping him of all power and authority. When Christ rose victorious from the grave, he led an innumerable host of redeemed captives out of Satan's grasp. And that blood-bought procession is still marching on.

Yet, amazingly, Christ's triumph at Calvary gave us even more than victory over death. It gained for us incredible spoils in this life: grace, mercy, peace, forgiveness, strength, faith, all the resources needed to lead an overcoming life. He has made every provision for the maintaining of his temple: "Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:6).

Consider Solomon as a type of Christ in the Old Testament. He built the temple (the church) with all the resources that David (the Father) had laid up for him. And when the temple needed maintenance, he tapped into the treasury (the Holy Spirit) reserved specifically for that purpose.

The Holy Spirit is showing us a marvelous truth here: Jesus has supplied us with all the resources we need, in his Holy Ghost. But we are responsible for tapping into that treasury, to maintain his temple. And the resources for maintaining the temple have to come directly from the spoils of our warfare.

Christ has given us everything necessary for this maintenance to take place. He has adopted us into his household. He stands as the cornerstone of the house. And he has cleaned the entire house. Finally, he has given us access to the very Holy of holies. So, by faith, we are now a fully established, complete temple. Jesus didn't build a house that's only half finished. His temple is complete.

Yet this temple has to be maintained. It must be kept in good repair at all times. And to do that can be very expensive. Of course, we know where the resources can be found: in the Spirit of Christ himself. He is the treasurer of all spoils. Yet he can't issue those resources to us if we don't see our need for them. In short, God won't maintain his temple without our cooperation.

That cooperation begins when we're in the midst of conflict. You see, our resources are the Christ-likeness we win while immersed in battle. They're the lessons, the faith, the character we gain from warfare with the enemy. So, whatever we're going through, whatever trial we're facing, we can know God has allowed it, for his purposes. There is value in the battle. And we can be confident that good will come out of it.

Paul even urges us to glory in our tribulations. Why? For the spoils: "Tribulation worketh patience" (Romans 5:3). Think of all the other spoils that result from tribulations: experience, hope, courage, wisdom, the love of God shed abroad.

God sovereignly allows our trials as a safeguard against breakdown.

If we didn't have conflict, pressure, trials, wars, we would become passive and lukewarm. Decay would set in, and our temple would lie in ruins. We wouldn't be able to handle the territory we've gained. That's why the enemy's plan against us is clear: he wants to take us out of the battle. His aim is to remove all the fight from us.

Try to imagine your temple as a literal building, made of brick and mortar. If you walked around it, you'd be able to point out the maintenance work that's been done through trials in the past. You could say, "See that roof? At one point it was leaking badly. I remember the battle I went through for God to repair it. In fact, he put a whole new roof on the house. And that window over there - it was once smashed and broken. The Lord allowed me to go through the test of my life over that. Now it's been replaced with this beautiful stained glass."

We find all our resources for maintenance - strength to go on, power over the enemy - in our spiritual battles. And on that day when we stand before the Lord, he will reveal to us: "Do you remember what you went through on that occasion? And on this date, and in that awful battle? Look at what you accomplished through it all: a house maintained, in divine order, without spot or blemish. It was all secured through the battles you won. Behold the result of your trials now. Wasn't it worth it all?"

Imagine what it would be like on that day to take the devil on a tour of your temple. You could show him the results of all his attacks against you, and tell him, "See what you did for me? You meant it to destroy me. But that trial proved to keep me pure. It gave me

patience, and it kept my fire burning for Jesus. What you meant for evil, he used to maintain this house.”

Are you in a battle right now? Are you facing intense spiritual warfare? Be encouraged: God has a purpose in it all. And his plan for you involves much more than merely surviving. He wants you to come forth with more - more resources, more spiritual riches, more strength - than you had when you entered the conflict.

The simple fact is, God has put his treasure in human bodies. He has made you a temple, a house for his Spirit to dwell in. And you have a responsibility to maintain that temple. If you become lazy and careless, neglecting the maintenance work needed — regular prayer, feeding on God’s Word, fellowshiping with his saints - decay will set in. And you’ll end up in absolute ruin.

Maybe right now you’re confused, discouraged and questioning. You may wonder, “I don’t see any purpose to this struggle. Why do I have to go any further in it? I’ve had enough.”

Tragically, many have quit the battle. And they’ve ended up bitter, hard, angry, their faith a heap of ashes. Why? They have no resources. They threw away their treasure when they walked away from their trials. Sadly, I know many pastors whose lives turned out this way. They simply gave up the fight. And when the winds of struggle and trial blew hard, their faith ended up shipwrecked.

As I look back on my own fifty years of ministry, I recall many times when it would have been easy for me to quit. I would pray, “Lord, I don’t understand this attack. Where did it come from? And when will it end? I don’t see any purpose in it at all.” But over time, I began to see fruit from those trials. And that fruit - resources, strength, spiritual wealth - supplied me in a way I couldn’t have gotten through any other means.

I urge you: take hold of your trial by faith, and believe God has allowed it. Know that he’s using it to make you stronger...to help you take spoils from Satan...to make you a blessing to others...and to sanctify it all to his glory.

(Please continue to next page for workbook questions)

THE SPOILS OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE
Follow-up Questions

1. What is the key verse of this study?

2. What are the “spoils of warfare”? Give examples.

3. Why did Abram present of portion of his spoils to Melchizidek?

4. What is the principle of Abram keeping a massive caravan of spoils from Sodom and Gomorrah?

5. When the Scripture speaks of maintaining the temple, what does this mean in the original Hebrew?

6. Where is God's temple today?

7. What did David do when he returned from battling the Amalekites?

8. Write out I Chronicles 30:20.

9. [Complete] Another example of God's purpose in our _____

is to take the _____ from _____ not just to

_____, but for _____.

The _____ we gain are meant to _____ to

_____.

10. In David's case, God was doing what?

11. What does the example of the four lepers going to the Syrian camp teach (II Kings 7:3-4)? Note Ephesians 3:20.

12. What was Satan trying to do in the story of Esther?

13. What were the Jews' spoils as a result of the defeat of Haman? Note Esther 8:16.

14. The greatest _____ of all took place at the _____.

15. What did it obtain for us?

16. Paul urges us to glory in our tribulations. Why?

17. If we didn't have conflict, pressures, trials and wars, what would happen?

18. What does it mean to "maintain the Temple"?
