

## WARNINGS AND PROMISES

The Bible is filled with “warnings” and “promises”. Both are important! Please consider:

**“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” (1 Cor. 9:24 – 10:13)**

Here is a brief summary of this passage. It contains both warnings and a promise!

- The Christian life is not like a casual stroll in the park, it is like a race.
- Athletes train and race for a crown that will not last while Christians train and race for a crown that will last forever.
- Paul disciplined himself lest after preaching to others he would be disqualified for the prize.
- The seriousness of this warning is illustrated by Hebrew history.
  - All the Israelites came out of Egypt.
  - They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
  - They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink.
  - God, however, was not pleased with most of them and they died in the desert.
  - These Israelites are an example to us that we should not do what they did.
  - They became idolaters and committed fornication.
  - They also grumbled and tested the Lord and were killed by a destroying angel.
  - All of these things happened to them as examples for us.
- **“So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall”.**
- **“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”.**

## THESE WARNINGS ARE REAL

Earlier in this letter Paul addressed a problem of immorality in the church at Corinth: **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?”** (1 Cor. 5:1-2).

The Scriptures are clear that those who continue to live wicked lives will not inherit the kingdom of God: **“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolators nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offender nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of our God”** (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

According to 1 Cor. 10:12 we are in the greatest danger when we think we are standing firm. As always **“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Prov. 16:18).

The “warnings” of Scripture are there for a purpose. Please do not disregard these warnings from God.

## THE PROMISES ARE ALSO REAL!

### THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY WILL BE ON THE PROMISES

While the warnings of Scripture are important and need to be taken seriously, it is the “promises” that are most effective in helping us to attain to the nature of Jesus and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Paul said **“I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law sin is dead”** (Rom. 7:7-8). The “warning” do not covet actually produced covetousness in Paul!

The “promises” are different from “warnings”. Please consider the importance of “promises” in escaping corruption: **“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”** (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

As Peter wrote, these “very great and precious promises” include “everything we need”: Paul agreed: **“All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God”** (1 Cor. 3:21-22).

Paul also wrote: **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;**

**perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.” (2 Cor. 4:7-9).**

The “promises” of God help us to escape lust and participate in His divine nature!

### THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCED OF PAUL

David wrote in Psalm 139 that God had constantly monitored his life from the time he was in his mother’s womb. This was encouraging to David for God was not his enemy, God was his Shepherd. The same could be said of Paul. Paul, as you know was originally know as “Saul of Tarsus”.

- Saul was set apart from birth to preach Christ to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). Imagine what an encouragement this promise was when Paul faced hardship and difficulty.
- Jesus appeared to him on the Road to Damascus to inform him of his calling (Acts 26:15-18).
- God sent a devout believer named Ananias to heal Saul of blindness and baptize him (Acts 22:10-16). Receiving his sight was a miracle never to be forgotten!
- Ananias also promised him that he would suffer for the Lord (Acts 9:16). This too was helpful for when Saul experienced fiery trials he was promised in advance that he never had to fall (1 Pet. 4:12-16).
- When the Jews in Damascus conspired to kill him his followers saved his life by lowering him through an opening in the wall (Acts 9:23-25). It was encouraging for him to remember the faithful brethren who held the rope and saved his life!
- When the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul, Barnabas brought him to the apostles and vouched for his conversion (Acts 9:26-27). Thank God for faithful friends like Barnabas.
- When the Grecian Jews in Jerusalem planned to kill him, the brothers took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus (Acts 9:28-30). Thank God for brethren who care!
- When the church at Antioch began telling the Good News to the Greeks, Barnabas went to Tarsus to get Saul and for a year they taught a great number of people (Acts 11:20-26). Probably everyone in ministry is in debt to someone like Barnabas!
- Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul were all prophets and teachers at Antioch. While they worshiped the Lord and fasted the Holy Spirit said: **“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:1-3).**
- Note that Barnabas and Saul were set apart to their work by the laying on of hands, fasting, and prayer. Today we often refer to this solemn experience as ordination.
- On the Island of Cyprus Saul confronted a sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus and blinded him by the power of the Lord. It was at that time that Saul’s name was changed to Paul (Acts 13:6-12).
- Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the island, witnessed this miracle and became a believer (Acts 13:12).
- Paul was later driven out of Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium by unbelievers who wanted to kill him (Acts 13:49-14:6).
- These unbelieving Jews followed Paul to Lystra and persuaded the crowd to stone him. They did stone him and then dragged him out of the city thinking he was dead (Acts 14:19).
- God miraculously raised Paul up from being stoned and he went back into the city. Then the next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe (Acts 14:20).

## PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH

We will briefly interrupt this list to discuss Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:1-10). This too, of course, illustrates the way the promises of God enhanced Paul's ministry.

While scholars debate what this thorn was, please consider that it might be associated with the stoning that took place at Lystra. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said that 14 years before he was caught up into the third heaven, but he didn't know whether he was alive or dead (2 Cor. 12:1-6). This would roughly correspond to the time when Paul was stoned at Lystra. When stoning someone to death it is logical to assume that they bashed in his head. They obviously did so and his injuries were so serious that they actually thought he was dead and dragged him out of town. Please consider that Paul's thorn in the flesh may have been a result of this stoning.

- Before he was stoned Paul was mistaken for the Greek god Hermes. This happened not only because Paul looked like a Greek god, but also spoke like one (Acts 14:12). When he wrote to the Corinthians, however, his bodily presence was weak and his speech was unimpressive (2 Cor. 10:10).
- Paul wrote to the Galatians that he bore upon his body the "marks" of Jesus (Gal. 6:16). Perhaps this referred to scars upon his face.
- Having your head bashed in would not only affect your ability to speak, but also to see. In this regard it seems that Paul had trouble speaking and also poor vision.
  - Paul's enemies said that his bodily presence was unimpressive and his speech amounted to nothing (2 Cor; 10:10).
  - Paul wrote to the Galatians that if it had been possible they would have torn out their own eyes and given them to him (Gal. 4:15).
  - He signed the letter to the Galatians by writing "large letters" (Gal. 6:11). See also 2 Thess. 3:17; and Col. 4:18.
  - The High Priest worn distinctive clothing with a special mitre on his head (Ex. 28:31-38), yet Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin without recognizing the high priest (Acts 23:1-5).
- IT IS A WONDERFUL PROMISE THAT GOD ONLY ALLOWED THINGS TO HAPPEN TO PAUL THAT WOULD MAKE HIM SPIRITUALLY STRONG (2 COR. 12:7-10).

## NOW LET US RETURN TO THE LIST

- The Jerusalem Council included the "apostles, elders, and the whole church" (Acts 15:22). They concluded that Paul was preaching exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted him to preach (Acts 15:1-29). This must have been a tremendous encouragement to Paul.
- When Paul and Silas returned to Lystra the Holy Spirit guided Paul to take Timothy with him on his journey (Acts 16:1-6; 1 Tim. 1:18).
- Timothy was a great encouragement! Of all Paul's helpers none were as good as Timothy (Phil. 2:20).
- Then the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to preach in Asia or Bithynia and directed him to Troaz. It was at Troaz that Luke joined their team (Acts 16:6-10). We know this because Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, started using the word "we" to describe Paul's team (Acts 16:10). Luke, was a beloved physician who could help Paul both physically and spiritually (Col. 4:14).

- Then God gave Paul a vision directing him to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Paul immediately obeyed that vision.
- Having been publicly beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, and with their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns (Acts 16:25). They actually believed the promises of God that everything was working out for the good because they loved God and were called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).
- That's when God sent an earthquake that enabled Paul to convert the Philippian jailer and his whole household (Acts 16:25-34).
- Philippi was a generous church and at one time they were the only church supporting Paul's ministry (Phil. 4:15). Even though Paul was in Thessalonica only three sabbath days (Acts 17:2), they sent him help again and again when he was in need (Phil. 4:16). This too was a great encouragement!
- At Corinth God added Aquila and Priscilla to Paul's team of workers (Acts 18:1-3).
- At Corinth Paul was so discouraged that **“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, no not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city’ (1 Cor. 18:9-10).**
- Paul was once so discouraged that he despaired even of life, but through that discouragement he learned not to rely upon himself, but upon God Who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:8-11).
- Later he wrote: **“When we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God who comforts the downcast comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the coming you had given him” (2 Cor. 7:5-7).**
- At Ephesus **“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them” (Acts 19:11-12).**
- At Troaz Paul raised a young man named Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:7-13).
- Unjustly imprisoned in Jerusalem, Paul was so discouraged that **“The Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome’ (Acts 23:11).** Thank God that He is a very present help in time of trouble (Ps. 46:1).
- When more than 40 unbelieving Jews took an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul, his nephew reported this to a centurion and saved Paul's life (Acts 23:12-22).
- Since Paul was a Roman citizen 470 soldiers were assigned to transfer Paul to Caesarea where he would be safe (Acts 23:23-24).
- When Paul appealed his case to Caesar the Roman government paid for his passage.
- When they were beset by a storm an angel of God stood beside Paul and said: **“Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you” (Acts 27:24).**
- As a prisoner in Rome Paul wrote four inspired letters that are now a part of our Bible (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).
- By the grace of God, all of the things which happened to Paul served to advance the gospel (Phil. 1:12).
- These are just a FEW of MANY things that happened to Paul that help us to understand that **“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”.**

- God used the church, Paul’s family, the government, Roman soldiers, the weather, angels, visions, an earthquake, a storm, a poisonous snake, and anything else that was needed to keep Paul from being tempted from what he was able to bear. As you know, on a variety of occasions the Lord Himself stood by Paul to make that promise come true.
- Believing the promises of God is a key to spiritual victory!

### THE CHOICE IS YOURS

God is monitoring your life just like he did the life of Paul. Paul was faithful until death and received the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). You can be faithful until death too! Every time you are tempted God will do everything necessary to **“provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”**.

- Will you take the way out and “stand”?
- Or will you choose to do your own will and “fall”?