

## 2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18

### WHEN STANDING ALONE...

“At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”<sup>1</sup>

**D**oes it seem as if you’re standing alone in the conflicts of life? As society appears increasingly opposed to any open practise of the Faith, do you find yourself feeling deserted, even lonely at times? Has the feeling of loneliness, the sense that you have been deserted, left you wondering if you’re the last follower of Christ left on the battlefields of life? Then, this message is for you.

Modern church life can sometimes leave the conscientious follower of Christ wondering who still stands firm in the battles of life. And at no time is this more the case than when you are compelled to face the foe without any fellow saints supporting you in your lonely stand. Perhaps it was at a time of physical trial. Perhaps the doctor delivered the terrifying diagnosis and was anything but compassionate when she delivered the bad news. Or perhaps it was when unexpected and crushing bills arrived, pressing you down and sucking the oxygen out of your hopes and dreams. Perhaps it is a conflict at work and there is no way you can bring others, not even your spouse, into the melee. You’re not even certain you can explain all the dynamics of what is taking place. Then, you go to church and the pastor speaks of how much God loves you, except you don’t really feel that love.

In the battles you face, you long for a respite, a break allowing breathing room, and there doesn’t seem to be any place to turn. Well-meaning friends promise to pray with you, or they may offer a few words of encouragement; but the words seem to fall flat because there is just no way they can understand. One of the worst things you heard was, “God won’t give you more than you can bear!” But you are already beyond that point and carrying more than you are capable of bearing. You’re standing alone and the foe is clearly winning. You don’t even have strength to look up, so even that possibility has been taken from you. Now what?

**ALONE! ALONE AGAINST THE WORLD!** “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.” We cannot complain when we deliberately dishonour God. We each have done such things and then complained how hard life is. We can expect pushback when we attack others or act in an unloving manner. A dog will bite when we have ignored its growl and continued provoking it nevertheless. People, also, will respond aggressively when we attack or provoke them. Similarly, we can’t disobey the will of God and expect that He will bless us.

Lynda and I ministered to a young woman who chose to live with a man without insisting that they commit to one another in marriage. Inevitably, she became pregnant. He insisted that she get an abortion. However, she believed it was a grave sin to take the life of the child growing within her womb. The father of that child informed her that since she would not do “the reasonable thing,” he had no choice but to desert her, leaving her destitute.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I still recall the doleful note in her voice as she sat at our kitchen table and spoke with us. “What more could I expect? He had no commitment to me; so I really can’t complain,” she said plaintively.

This young woman would now face life alone and with inadequate resources to raise this child; there would never be enough resources or time to do all that she wanted. She would be constantly exhausted because of the growing demands on her life. Worse yet, the child would grow up with a decided handicap in the game of life because of the mother’s choice. Though she was now alone, she could not complain against God because she chose this difficult course.

However, there are yet those times when we have done the right thing and still find ourselves under assault. Such times distressingly common; at these times we will be surprised, knocked off balance and left disoriented. I want us to think about the fact that assaults because we did what is right are surprisingly common in the Christian life. I don’t want any of you to imbibe from the poisoned spring that asserts that Christians will never face opposition. We can anticipate opposition *because* we are Christians.

The Apostle of love cautions believers, “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you” [1 JOHN 3:13]. In saying this, he echoes the Master. During the days of His flesh, Jesus warned the disciples they would face opposition because of the Faith. “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” [MATTHEW 10:16-22a].

Speaking of the end times, Jesus spoke of the last days. I know that he words are primarily given as a warning of attack against those turning to the Christ during the days of the Great Tribulation; however, in a measure the warning applies throughout this present age. Jesus had just spoken of the destruction of the Temple, stirring the disciples’ curiosity; so, they asked two questions. They wanted to know when the Temple would be destroyed and what would be taking place when Jesus came in His full glory. They had conflated the separate events without realising what they had done.

Jesus responded by saying, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold” [MATTHEW 24:4-12].

Jesus’ brothers were ridiculing the Master on another occasion, prompting Jesus to address their unbelief quite pointedly. “My time has not come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify about it that its works are evil” [JOHN 7:6, 7]. What Jesus said on that occasion was amplified and applied to all disciples as He prepared them for His Passion.

Throughout the years of my service before the Lord I've often cited the passage to which I now refer, and I ask you to listen yet again. The teaching is neglected from the pulpit today, but it is vital if the child of God will be strong in the face of opposition. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause'" [JOHN 15:18-25].

Permit me to give you some insight into the Greek text in order to understand the impact of the Apostle's words. He speaks of his "defence," using a legal, technical term for the defence presented when charges were brought in court. This particular Greek word lies behind the English term "apologetics." The term is used to describe Paul's speech presented in Jerusalem after he was arrested. He began that defence by saying, "Brothers and fathers, hear the defence [*apología*] that I now make before you" [ACTS 22:1]. Using the adjective and definite article, Paul likely is referring to what we would recognise as a preliminary hearing.<sup>2</sup>

At this critical juncture, no one attended the hearing, no one spoke up on Paul's behalf—he stood alone facing the charge, likely sedition or lese majesté. Note the adversative, "but." The Greek indicates a sense of utter abandonment. The verb is aorist, indicating an action that was deliberate, definite. It is as though he is looking at every possible source of help—each potential supporter individually and charging each one with deliberately abandoning him. Their rejection was personal and total. Paul adds the clause, "all deserted me." The phrasing is plural and emphatic, as though he will lay the responsibility at the feet of each craven individual who chose silence rather than the truth.

Stand athwart the movements of this dying world and you will be opposed; and the follower of the Master cannot help but stand opposed to the world. Consequently, the Christian will not be loved by this fallen world. Take a brief excursion with me throughout the history of the faithful. The LORD God commanded Noah to build an ark. The account provided in the first Book of the Bible is pointed and pertinent. "The earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood'" [GENESIS 6:11-14].

Much later, we read God's assessment of Noah. "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" [HEBREWS 11:7]. For one hundred twenty years Noah preached, pleading with people to repent [see GENESIS 6:3]; however, the message of grace was rejected by those living in the world, thus bringing judgement upon themselves. How lonely it must have been for Noah to witness concerning God's mercy and plead, only to be rejected by all save his immediate family!

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<sup>2</sup> See John A. Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009), 462

Again, I invite you to think of Elijah who was used mightily of God to destroy the worship of Baal, only to have Jezebel, the queen, threaten to lift his head from his shoulders. Terrified, the great man of God ran for his life, stumbling into the wilderness where he met the Living God. He cried out his complaint, telling God that he might as well die since he was all alone. The LORD gently rebuked him: “I still have left in Israel seven thousand followers who have not bowed their knees to Baal or kissed the images of him” [1 KINGS 19:18, NET BIBLE]. There were seven thousand worshippers of the Living God that hadn’t bowed the knee to Baal! Where were they? Elijah had stood alone; he was now mentally and physically exhausted. A man can face a thousand enemies if someone, anyone, stands with him as he faces the enemy. Alone, the most valiant of men may well flee, and especially when exhausted.

Those are examples from the Old Testament of men who stood alone before the religious and civil powers of this dying world; and the Apostle now states that he stood alone before the emperor. What of events after the last account included in the New Testament? Surely, as the Faith spread throughout the world and as believers grew in numbers, there was a braver resistance mounted against the evils of this dying world! Take a stroll with me through the pages of church history and think of a sampling of courageous men compelled to stand alone.

Athanasius stood almost alone for the apostolic Faith. Orthodoxy was almost subsumed by the teachings of a heretical bishop named Arius. The Arian controversy could cost Athanasius his standing among the overseers of the ancient churches and even threaten his life. Meletius and those who supported him, falsely charged Athanasius with sacrilege against a Meletian priest named Ischyrras. Athanasius was compelled to appear before the Emperor Constantine to defend himself. The Emperor dismissed the case when it was discovered that there was no substance to the charge.<sup>3</sup>

Bishops supporting the Arian heresy then charged Athanasius with murdering a Meletian bishop named Arsenius and cutting off his hand in order to perform unspecified magic rites. Those bringing the charge even had a human hand in their possession; they claimed that the hand they possessed was the hand of Arsenius. Moreover, Arsenius had not been seen for some time, lending credence to the charge. Athanasius was summoned for trial before his fellow overseers at Tyre. Standing trial before his Arian enemies, Athanasius summoned a veiled figure at the back of the church, and when this mysterious person came forward and removed his veil, it was discovered that this was the bishop Arsenius—not only alive but with both of his hands. Of course, Athanasius was exonerated of all charges.<sup>4</sup>

The old man’s battles were not ended, however. He was charged again with the old charge of sacrilege and with threatening to withhold grain from the markets of Constantinople. Ultimately, he was banished to Gaul and Arius was about to be welcomed again into the Faith. However, God intervened and Arius fell dead on the day he was to return to receive the Communion Meal.<sup>5</sup> Threats to the Faith would continue until near the end of Athanasius’ life. Nevertheless, the old man prevailed at last, moving the churches to declare the Trinitarian Faith we received from the Apostles.<sup>6</sup> Throughout his days of service and in the multitude of trials he faced, Athanasius stood almost alone.

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<sup>3</sup> George Hodges, **The Early Church from Ignatius to Augustine** (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA, New York, NY, Cambridge, UK 1915) 139-141

<sup>4</sup> Hodges, op. cit., 141-142

<sup>5</sup> Hodges, op. cit., 142-144

<sup>6</sup> Hodges, op. cit., 144-149

Another stalwart was Luther, who when haled before the Diet of Worms declared, “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.” Then he added, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”<sup>7</sup>

The Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, provides another example of standing alone. In March and April of 1887 Spurgeon published two articles entitled “The Down Grade” in his monthly magazine, *The Sword and Trowel*.<sup>8</sup> These articles, written by a fellow Baptist pastor, Robert Shindler, recounted the history of major Protestant denominations in England since the beginning of the decline of the Puritans in 1662. Shindler raised the alarm against an obvious movement toward what we now identify as liberalism or modernism. The articles hit the Baptists like a hammer. Spurgeon followed up with an article he penned in August of that year after being inundated by communications from fellow pastors who witnessed the movement toward error within the Baptist Union.

Despite multiple conversations and correspondence with numerous leaders of the Baptist Union, Spurgeon refused to name individuals, asking instead that Baptists focus on the doctrinal issues presented. However, those very leaders who had privately agreed with Spurgeon, even supplying him with the names of men whom they knew to be deviating from the Faith of Christ the Lord and providing instances where the Faith was compromised, refused to speak openly. Their cowardice permitted a response by individuals determined to move the churches to embrace error.

The craven response of leaders resulted in Spurgeon withdrawing from the Baptist Union, in the process suffering censure from the very body he had sought to save. Spurgeon had requested that the Union adopt a doctrinal statement declaring a thoroughgoing evangelicalism; something the assembly refused to do. The silence of the Baptist Union resulted in their rejection of the most powerful preacher who had ever borne the Baptist name in their nation.

Spurgeon’s view of those who stood opposed to him is provided in a statement he wrote. “A Christian minister must expect to lose his repute among men; he must be willing to suffer every reproach for Christ’s sake; but, then, he may rest assured that he will never lose his real honour if it be risked for the truth’s sake, and placed in the Redeemer’s hand. The day shall declare the excellence of the upright, for it will reveal all that was hidden, and bring to the light that which was concealed. There will be a resurrection of characters as well as of persons. Every reputation that has been obscured by clouds of reproach, for Christ’s sake, shall be rendered glorious when the righteous shall ‘shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.’”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, “Introduction,” **131 Christians Everyone Should Know** (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2000) 35

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, **C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1878-1892, vol. 4** (Fleming H. Revell Company, Chicago; New York; Toronto 1900) 253-264; C. H. Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, vol. 34** (Passmore & Alabaster, London 1888) ii-iv; John F. MacArthur Jr., **Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes like the World** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 1993) 197-225; Mark Hopkins, “The Down-Grade Controversy,” **Christian History Magazine, Issue 29: Charles Spurgeon: England’s “Prince of Preachers”** (Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 1991); H. Leon McBeth, **The Baptist Heritage** (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 1987) 302-306

<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon, **Autobiography**, op. cit., 253

I dare not compare myself to these stalwarts of the Faith. Nevertheless, as is true for all Christians, I have experienced trials when I was compelled to stand alone. I recall the loneliness resulting when a newspaper editor slandered me, condemning me for refusing to participate in an ecumenical effort he favoured. I had stated repeatedly that in conscience I could not participate. He savaged my name and sought to destroy the congregation that I was then planting. Yet, God stood with me.

I stood alone when a church council embraced a preacher who lied; and though men who knew the truth were present, they chose not to stand with the truth because they would not oppose that man because of his race. Those men pleaded for me to understand; nevertheless, I stood alone. They had been unable to stand firm when a church treasurer was caught stealing moneys and they were unable to confront a pastor who lied and manipulated the congregation for his own benefit. I stood alone.

In a denominational assembly moving toward deliberate acceptance same-sex marriage, I stood alone while fellow ministers denounced me and spoke ill of me. Though leaders of that denomination privately indicated they believed as I do, they permitted the attacks to continue lest they receive disapproval from those choosing to turn from the Faith once delivered to the saints.

I have been attacked at other times for refusal to link up with professing Christians in open defiance of biblical morality in ministerial alliances. Privately, fellow pastors have confided that they believe as I do, but the cost of open refusal to participate with unbelievers was too high for them to take such a stand. Yet, they allowed my name to be trampled in the mud through their silence and through their participation in unions they professed to abhor.

And I am quite certain that you, if you stand firmly in this holy Faith, have experienced such isolation; if you have not yet experienced this loneliness, you shall ere your journey is complete. We have already heard the words of the Apostle of Love cautioning believers, “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you” [1 JOHN 3:13]. John only echoes the Master’s testimony in His High Priestly prayer. “I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” [JOHN 17:14].

Jesus’ words are not provided merely to fill space in the Gospel accounts. There is reason to be concerned at His stark warning, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets” [LUKE 6:26]. James, the brother of our Master, confronts the adulterous nature that infects each of us when he writes, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4].

The writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians urges his readers, “The bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” [HEBREWS 13:10-13].

We do not seek the praise of man; rather, we seek the praise of God. Peter urges believers, “If you are insulted for the Name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you... It is time for judgement to begin at the Household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the Gospel of God? And

‘If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” [1 PETER 4:14, 17-19].

**DON’T TAKE IT PERSONALLY.** “May it not be charged against them!” Well, when you stand alone, how shall you respond? What should you do? The Apostle Peter has instructed us, “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” [1 PETER 4:14, 17-19]. Paul forgives, and lying behind his choice to forgive is the truth articulated by Peter.

Paul felt keenly the fact that he stood alone. His words seem broader than needed. Luke was with him when he stood trial; and Tychicus, who was later sent to Ephesus, was also with the Apostle at trial [see 2 TIMOTHY 4:11, 12]. Additionally, some Roman Christians were standing with him [see 2 TIMOTHY 4:21]. It seems obvious that Paul has in mind individuals who could have provided verbal testimony in his defence, and yet chose to avoid standing with him. Paul is not bitter; his prayer is, “May it not be charged against them” [2 TIMOTHY 4:16b]! Grasp this principle—*we must never excuse sin, but we must seek every way possible to extend mercy*. Paul demonstrates the difference in how we are to treat enemies who seek to injure and friends who disappoint. Of an enemy Paul would say, “The Lord will repay his deeds” [2 TIMOTHY 4:14]; of friends, he said, “May it not be charged against them.”

A recent article addresses the issue of “Why Church Hurts So Much.”<sup>10</sup> “People who are hurt the most by the church are the ones who care most about it,” says Matt Appling. Tragically, because so many people are hurt by churches, Christians spend an inordinate amount of time apologising for those who do the hurting. Rather than apologising for imposters masquerading as Christians and for fellow believers who are untaught or who are susceptible to being misled by unqualified teachers, we should identify the root of the problem and refute their wickedness through righteous, godly lives. I urge us to learn to be gentle toward those who quaver and quail when facing the fire.

We each have what Appling calls “Low Maintenance Friends.” If these people were not in our lives, it would make no difference. Tragically, there are such people who have precisely this sort of relationship with the congregation. Perhaps they profess to be Christians, but their relationship to Christ and to the Faith is tenuous at best—they are on the fringes of the Faith. Truthfully, it is impossible to be hurt by such people—there is no emotional investment, no risk.

Contrast these individuals with those people in whom you have invested the most—let’s call them High Maintenance Friends. These are emotionally risky relationships. Normally, we think of emotionally risky relationships as children, spouses and perhaps other family members. We put a lot into these relationships knowing that should something go wrong the pain will be tremendous. Grasp this truth—*any relationship that is worth keeping has emotional risk*! We do not benefit from an emotionally distant marriage or an absent friend. The same is true of your church—you get out of it what you put into it. However, investment of yourself carries a risk!

The more emotionally invested we are in our congregation, the more vulnerable we are to disappointment and hurt. If we don’t care about Christ and His people, we won’t be hurt by those people when they inevitably disappoint us. Appling concludes that the church relationship breaks down because our love turns out to be conditional. The church—the elders, the deacons, the people—didn’t meet our expectations and we quit. The problem is not the church, the problem is us! Our love is conditional. Eventually, we will each be disappointed in the church.

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<sup>10</sup> Matt Appling, “Why Church Hurts So Much,” churchleaders.com, [http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/148808-matt\\_appling\\_why\\_church\\_hurts\\_so\\_much.html](http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/148808-matt_appling_why_church_hurts_so_much.html), accessed 7 June 2016

Let me drop some theology on you. Though redeemed, we Christians are yet fallen people. Our old nature plagues us, always drawing against the upward pull of the Spirit of God. There is a war raging in our lives as our old nature wars against the Spirit God has given each of us. This is the thrust of the dark words that Paul has written in the Letter to Roman Christians. “I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” [ROMANS 7:21-25]. We will disappoint one another because we are utterly depraved.

Again, we are reminded that we need not surrender to the flesh, though it is obvious that we do so far too frequently and far too readily. In the following chapter, Paul has written, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” [ROMANS 8:1-12].

Let me summarise: though redeemed, we are utterly depraved. However, because we are depraved does not excuse surrendering to the flesh. This is the reason that Paul continues, “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” [ROMANS 8:13-17].

It is on this basis that we are taught, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” [EPHESIANS 4:32]. This command is iterated when the Apostle writes, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” [COLOSSIANS 3:12, 13]. This is but a practical application of Jesus’ teaching, “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” [MATTHEW 6:14].



**THE CHRISTIAN NEVER STANDS ALONE.** “But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Earthly friends had disappointed the Apostle, but his prayer was that God would not hold their weakness against them. These final statements reveal the glory of the Christian life. When earthly friends disappoint, we experience the faithfulness of Christ the Lord in a more profound way. The Lord stood by Paul and strengthened him. Just so, I am certain that you, my fellow saints, are able to recall a time when the Master stood by you and strengthened you. Perhaps it was that lonely time when you heard the doctor’s dreaded diagnosis of your condition. Perhaps it was when a phone call interrupted your sleep and a voice urged you to hurry if you wished to see your loved one alive. Perhaps it was when you faced criticism and assault from erstwhile friends. Whatever the trial, you knew the presence of the Lord—you were more aware of Him standing with you than you had ever been aware before or since.

You had quoted the verse, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” [PHILIPPIANS 4:13]; but after this, the verse was no longer theory—it was experience. Blessed is the one for whom this is not a singular experience; blessed are you when you can say that this has been your experience on several occasions. You have been emboldened and encouraged to continue in the Faith because you stood alone though knowing that the Lord stood with you. You will not be bested by the wicked one because you have relied on Christ’s strength.

Paul had another experience of the Lord standing with him when he was beset in Jerusalem. On that occasion, “The Lord stood by him and said, ‘Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about Me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome’” [ACTS 23:11].

Yet again, when imperiled at sea, God ensured that he knew he was not alone. Paul testified, “This very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul’ you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you” [ACTS 27:23, 24].

Surely this is but the fulfilment of Christ’s promise to those who follow Him and serve Him. Jesus promised, “Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” [MATTHEW 10:17-20].

God does not desert His own. Though they are cast into the furnace, they do not stand alone. How precious is the promise of the Lord our God:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.”

[ISAIAH 43: 2]

God preserved Paul “so that through [him] the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” God had a purpose for the Apostle; he was not delivered just so he could say he was delivered—he was to fulfil the ministry God had given him. And that is precisely why God preserves you and stands with you—so that His purpose may be fulfilled.

**2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18**  
**WHEN STANDING ALONE**

Paul was not deserted; he was delivered! Just so, you are not deserted; you are being delivered. When God called the Apostle, his commission included carrying the Name of the Lord before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel [see **ACTS 9:15**]. This leads me to believe that Paul stood before Nero himself, bearing testimony of Christ and His power to save. Don't you wish you could have heard what the Apostle said on that occasion?

Just so, we do not know who hears our words or receives our testimony when we send out the message of life. We have no way of knowing what impact our witness may have when we stand alone. What we can know for a certainty is that Christ stands with us and strengthens us, ensuring that we are rescued from the lion's mouth. Glory! We can say with confidence, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom." Amen; and amen.