

# Wanted - Dead or Alive

by Stella Paterson

There is a sense of foreboding in the air. No nation is immune to the downward spiral in every area of life as we have known it. Politicians are making plans on such a grand scale that it is breathtaking, with world leaders coming into agreement on issues where once there was no common ground. The prospects of such can, and does, strike fear in the hearts of many.

At the same time as we see the decline in what we refer to as "the world," we have the apostasy that was prophesied and has now been witnessed for many years. The "church" is in as big a mess as the world, with rampant spread of false doctrines, proliferation of anything and everything that may appeal to the flesh of man and the ever-increasing departure from surrender to the only One who has the answer to it all.

In the midst of all these things, there is a message of hope. In the midst of all these things, God has an ultimate plan. Whether "dead" or "alive," we have a God who *is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*. Now let's get to this message which has such a strange title.

## **Perilous times**

These are indeed the perilous times of which the Apostle Paul spoke, in 2 Timothy 3:1, which begins the passage about the self-centered, self-exalting manifestations of those who have a *form of godliness but deny the power thereof*. In verses 2 through 4 we find descriptions of every kind of evil imaginable. But in verse 5, where he says they have "a form of godliness," we see how the reference is to what could be termed "ultra-religious," fleshly individuals parading as Christians. How often do we hear of this passage in reference to the "world?"

"From such turn away" are the words Paul used regarding those who have a *form of godliness but deny the power thereof*. This brings to mind the time when Jesus was hanging on the Cross, and the Father turned away from Him. If God turned away from Jesus whose flesh was exposed on Calvary's tree, do we think He would not turn away from us when our flesh is so blatantly exposed? We know that as to the flesh we are speaking symbolically. There was nothing wrong with the "flesh" of the beloved Son of God; He simply came in the "likeness" of sinful flesh. The lesson is for us!

There is coming another time when the Lord will turn away from fleshly man. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus tells of those who, "in that day," will say to Him how they did so many things in His Name. In response, His words will be "*I never knew you; depart from me. . .*"

How many are there who honestly believe they are Christians? They pray in Jesus' Name, they believe they worship Him, they do many things in "His Name," yet they don't really have a relationship with Him. "Self" is on the throne of their lives and Jesus takes second place. They may believe He has first place because they "confess Him before men," but in their heart of hearts they reject the deep work of His Spirit of Grace. They cannot discern themselves, and have developed a sense of accomplished "righteousness" which has deceived others who are equally without discernment. It all has the appearance of the "real thing," when in reality they are without Christ.

All around us can be seen things of the world that truly represent "perilous times," but when we read Paul's words, we know he is speaking of those who believe they are Christians. They have denied the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They are completely without strength, as the definition of the Greek word for "perilous" shows here: "through the idea of *reducing* the strength; *difficult*, that is, *dangerous*."

### **Strength - with and without**

Let's take a closer look at that word "strength." It is used in various places, and often points to the presence of the Holy Spirit in man to impart strength and Life. For example, in Romans 5:6, Paul said, "For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "Without strength" means "strengthless" and is derived from the word for "strength," which means "to *strengthen*, that is, (figuratively) *confirm (in spiritual knowledge and power)*." Peter used the word "strengthen" in this verse: "*But may the God of all grace, the One having called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, may He Himself make you complete--He will establish, **strengthen**, and firmly ground you.*" (1 Peter 5:10 EMTV) Notice he speaks of suffering "a little while." We'll get more into that a little later.

There are so many things around today, waiting to rob us of our spiritual strength. In 1 Peter 5:7, we find the words, "*Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you.*" It is significant that the word for "care" is defined as "(through the idea of *distraction*); *solicitude*." What a wonderful promise! We are to give over to Jesus the *distractions* that keep us from full surrender, and He will take care of it. We find the same word used in Matthew 13:22, when Jesus said "*And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that hears the word; and the **cares** [distractions] of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.*"

We need to include Peter's words from 1 Peter 5:8-9, which tells us, "*Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand **steadfast in your faith**, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world.*" Satan can only "devour" those who do not remain steadfast in their trust in Christ for

their spiritual well-being. They end up back "in the world." This admonition from Peter's next epistle is something we must not take lightly. He is speaking of the false teachers who would come in the last days.

For, uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:18-22)

There seems to be a strong undercurrent in the form of a deceptive move to put people under the Law of Moses. It all sounds very "good" and honorable, and out of a heart of love for their Lord, many are becoming entrapped. But it is according to the knowledge of good and evil, and fruitless in making one righteous, or maintaining righteousness, as Paul the Apostle said. These are his words, in Galatians 3:21: "*Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for **if there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law.***" Only Jesus can *make us alive*--there is nothing we can do to accomplish it, or to make ourselves *more* alive. Paul also made the point here, with these words from Galatians 2:21: *I do not make void the grace of God: for **if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought.*** This verse also makes a clear statement: "*For there is a disannulling of a foregoing commandment because of its **weakness** [Greek: 'strengthless'] and unprofitableness (for the law made nothing perfect), and a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw nigh unto God.*" (Hebrews 7:18-19) There again is that word "strengthless." Let's look at the definition. It is "strengthless (in various applications, literally, or figuratively and morally)."

This leads us now to the definition and use of the word . . .

## **Infirmity**

Once again we see how word meanings bring so much better understanding to passages we are prone to accept according to present-day perceived definitions. For example, the Greek word for "infirmity" is very revealing. The word *astheneia* is defined as "*feebleness (of body or mind); by implication *malady*; moral *frailty*.*" The words "by implication" are the clue to the spiritual implications when this word is used in the New Testament. The word "weakness" is also translated from the same Greek word.

Our flesh (self) is full of *moral frailty*, as this definition for "moral" shows: "*relating to, dealing with, or capable of making the distinction between, right and wrong in conduct.*" Even with the knowledge of good and evil, man is still deficient in fully *making the distinction between, right and wrong in conduct.*

But look what Jesus accomplished on man's behalf! In Matthew 8:17b, we read, "*He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our diseases.*" He took ALL our infirmities--not only the physical ones. He took them to the Cross, arose triumphant over all, and now dwells by His Spirit in us--without infirmities! He is our Righteousness; He leads us by His Spirit to walk in Truth. He is the Truth, the Life and the Way.

That is why it is so foolish to think we can be righteous by following laws. That too is the reason the Hebrew people were told that God would give them a new heart and that He would write His laws on their hearts, so that out of them would come obedience to His will and His ways; not in their strength, but His.

Jesus paid the supreme sacrifice in the most horrible manner. He fulfilled the Law so that no man should have to struggle to obey every part, through the inherent moral frailty of flesh and self. If God went that far, do we think He stopped, folded His arms and reclined on His throne, with the intent to now watch us with a critical eye so He can judge and punish us when we mess up? No; not at all! His whole plan was for the Holy Spirit to do the work in man, which is impossible for man to do in and of himself.

A glowing example of what we are talking about can be found in Paul's words. He had been given what he called "a thorn in the flesh," a "messenger of Satan" to buffet him. When he asked the Lord to remove his *thorn in the flesh*, this is the response he received:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in **weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my **weaknesses**, in order that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I delight in **weaknesses**, in insults, in calamities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For whenever I am **weak**, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 EMTV)

### **Strength of my life**

In a recent email from a friend regarding some dissension that had come to her attention, she wrote, "I just can't drum up the old energy or enthusiasm for debating." When I read her words, my thoughts immediately went to my own weakened physical state, and I understood fully where she was coming from. At that moment, the Lord gave to me the essence of what I am sharing in this article. He also showed me that I should share my personal experience as an allegory.

As [my testimony](#) shows, my body took quite a "beating" in 2003. Even though the hospital tests showed no immediate damage to my major organs, they have since deteriorated, especially in the past several months. The circulation to all parts of my body is less than adequate, due to the sepsis which causes the flesh to become blocked, thus preventing blood to flow as it should. Because of the damaged organs, the poor circulation and the resulting inability to function as I once did, I find I am in a "physically frail" state. Most of my time is spent at home where I can be comfortable. Because my flesh is sore, particularly in my legs, it is difficult to wear hose or shoes for any length of time.

My weakness goes back to an earlier time. In 1990, I suffered work-related burn-out. Since then I have learned to pace myself so as not to have a relapse and need an extended time of rest to recover again. It was in 1990 that my journey with the Lord began in earnest. He had my full attention, and in His presence there was strength in my body that was impossible otherwise. He became everything to me, as He took me through His word in answer to my prayer to have a hunger for His word, to be shown the meaning of Calvary, and to know Him by revelation.

Now again I find myself feeling completely burned out. Of course, I speak of physical "flesh" in that regard. In my physical weakness and "feeling" more dead than alive, I am down to "nothing"; I am just a weak, empty vessel. There is no strength to "produce" anything out of my flesh; it is nigh unto impossible.

This is where the Lord comes in. I am only able to do the things He gives me to do because He is the Strength of my life. Like Paul the Apostle, "*when I am weak, then I am strong.*" When I write, or do word studies, it is only because of Him and His Spirit in me. Without Him I can do nothing--literally! Because I completed only half of my high school education, He gives me words to use in articles. When I look up the meaning, I find they are perfect for what I am to write. He also gives me all the Scriptures to use.

Even though it is not enjoyable, being in this condition, there is no place I would rather be. The Lord has proven Himself to be more than I could ever desire. I long for His presence more than any other thing, and so look forward to times when I can feast on His revealed Word. I thank Him that He saw fit to teach me the truths I can share with others. I will continue to do so, as long as I have breath, and/or as long as we have freedom of speech and the avenues to communicate with one another.

With that being said, I must hasten to add that I do appreciate all the emails from folks who read the things I write. Even though I may be at times slow in responding, I will, in due time. More urgent ones, I make an effort to do as soon as possible; or, shorter ones that only take a few moments. I am so touched by your words, and am encouraged to continue on when some days seem more difficult than others. You all are a blessing to me!

Enough about me! Let's get to the meat of what the Lord spoke to my heart.

### **The allegory**

We speak so much about flesh, and dying to self, but are we making it seem like one more thing we feel WE must do? I am reminded of Paul's words to the Romans, in chapter 11, where he said, "*For God has shut up all unto disobedience [Greek: 'obstinate and rebellious disbelief'], that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!*" (verses 32-33) He has *shut us all up unto obstinate and rebellious disbelief*. Only He is able to do what we find impossible to do. Only He is able to mortify our flesh; we need only be willing, as Paul said with these words: "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*" (Romans 12:1)

If only we could get the point across that we cannot be "holy," except through submission of our empty selves to the Holy Spirit of Grace. As *living sacrifices*, presented to Him, *self* can be purged by His presence to make us fit for eternity. This is the only "reasonable service" we have to offer to the Lord. Nothing of *self* is of any value to Him unless it has reached the point of realizing the utter futility of flesh.

We are keenly aware of the vast numbers of evils befalling the peoples of the world. No one will be immune to the increasing trials and pressures. As Revelation 3:10 shows, there is a *time of trial* coming upon all who dwell upon the earth. Do we think God will be turning His back on us now, and allowing these things to wreak havoc in every aspect of our lives without His Spirit's influence? No! He is still God. He is still in control. He is still at work to bring souls to trust in that which was accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. I fully believe that when we are pressed to the end of our resources, both physically and spiritually, He will be able to do what we have prevented all our lives while we remained in that state of *obstinate and rebellious disbelief*. Yes, even we who believe we are walking by His Spirit have areas of *self* we have not surrendered to His crucifying power. Will He leave us now? Not by any means! He will complete that which was begun. When we have reached the place where we are weak and down to "nothing," with no place to look but "up," God will have His way. He will work in us that which only He can do. We will have no strength to resist. Our flesh will have come to its end. God knows our hearts, and if our heart is toward Him, He will lovingly take our weakness and turn it into His strength. Like Paul, in our weakness we will have His strength. Yes, there may be tears, but they will be tears of surrender to the wonderful cleansing of the last vestige of self that we finally realize we had not given over to His crucifying power.

As long as we are in this body, we will have areas of *self* that will be revealed by our loving Lord, as long as we look to Him with willingness to have His Spirit cleanse us. It is a moment by moment thing, but He is faithful, and "*He who began a good work in you will complete [Greek: 'fulfill completely'] it until the day of Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 1:6b) Are we willing to allow Him to deliver us from *self*? That's all it takes--willingness. Whether *dead or alive*, He wants us to come to Him. He will work in us the death that is necessary, by the quickening Spirit who gives Life. He works the work of faith in us, so that our trust is absolutely in Him. Praise Him for His mercy! What an awesome, awesome God!

The Psalmist David wrote about the place we should dwell, and what can be anticipated by one whose faith is fully in Christ. I share this Psalm here for your encouragement, for we all need it in these days when so much is going wrong.

He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. For he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you shall take refuge: his truth is a shield and a buckler. You shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flies by day; for the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come nigh you. Only with your eyes shall you behold, and see the reward of the wicked. For you, O LORD, are my refuge! you have made the Most High your habitation; there shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come nigh your tent. For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the serpent you shall trample under feet. Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he has known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation. Psalm 91

We have two more messages by Andrew Murray. They will prove to be a tremendous aid in bringing understanding to the things we have just shared here. Click [here](#) for *Impossible With Man - Possible With God*. And [here](#) for *O Wretched Man That I Am*.

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