

## ***TROPHY OR TRIUMPH***

Leaving the presence and protection of God behind is an invitation to humiliation. It is important to understand the difference between nude and naked. One is a state of undress between two halves of one flesh. The other is an enticement to sin. One is a condition of purity and innocence where honesty becomes the only choice. The other is a source of embarrassment while seeking concealment. One is made possible by love, the other makes lust possible. Nude is the way we were created by God in the beginning. Naked is how Satan would have us in the end. Sin strips it's slain.

The life of King Saul is a study of the results of sin. When he began his reign, he was humble. He quickly came to believe that because of his relationship to God's people, he was above the rules. When the man of God did not act fast enough to suit him, he sacrificed in Samuel's place. His idea was better than God's idea. This behavior would be repeated over and over as he walked in pride and arrogance before God. Although he was instructed to utterly destroy the Amelakites, his better idea was to demonstrate his generosity by letting some of them live. David refused to wear Saul's armor, preferring instead to place his trust in his God. Saul's armor, though a source of pride to him, wound up as trophies in the houses of his enemies. Their ultimate trophy was the naked and headless body of King Saul. They hung it upon their city wall. His relationship with God was destroyed by disobedience long before his body was destroyed by the enemies whose lives he had spared. What was left of him was a grim reminder of the results and wages of sin.

On the battlefield, when the fighting would stop, the bodies would often be stripped of anything of value. If Satan wins in his battle against us, there will be no dignity in defeat. Our witness and our testimony will be removed. Our dreams will be gone along with our future and our decency. In the garden of Eden, in the presence of God, they were naked, but not ashamed. On the battlefield, when it is the enemy that has stripped you and is laughing at your exposure and your vulnerability, shame is all you have left. The only thing necessary to begin the process of humiliation is to voluntarily begin the removal of the full armor of God. It was designed for the type of war in which we find ourselves and will protect us, unless we remove it because of pride or discomfort.

Our other main source of protection is the strength of the shepherd. The same one who taught David, the bear killer, everything he knew. The same shepherd who decided that the best way to lead lambs was to become one. This shepherd warns us to stick close because our adversary is walking around as a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Someone outside of the safety of the flock and the shepherd. Sometimes the flock will move on, following the leading of the shepherd. It is not wise to lag behind. Sometimes we are drawn to the fence and beyond for the grass we are sure is greener. It is there, with our heads down, grazing, and separate from the flock, that the lion attacks. We never even see him coming.

The wages of sin is death. Make no mistake. We may play with sin, but it will not play with us. It is reported that when Leonardo DaVinci was painting "The Last Supper", he began the painting by having a man model Christ for him. Years later, he ended with the same man depicting Judas. The difference was a life of sin in the interim years. If we have ever declared an allegiance to the cross, we have earned the enmity of Satan. Our declaration of independence from Satan was the opening volley of a war with him. If he ever gets past our defenses, he will do his best to humiliate us before all of heaven and earth prior to killing us. God's grace is more than sufficient to protect us, if we are willing to cry for help. But if pride binds us from crying for help, we will

shortly find ourselves stripped of everything we once held dear. A life of carousing, smoking, and drinking is depicted in advertisements as being glamorous. What is not shown are the end results of lung cancer, alcoholism, and AIDS. Headless, naked bodies hung on the walls of hell. With all of the enemy laughing. At what used to be royalty.

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Have you ever considered how Satan must feel, seeing you who were once his, walking around as advertisement of God's ability to triumph over him and negate his power? Is it easy to believe that Satan will retaliate if you give him a chance? Will he be merciful?
2. Saul quickly forgot who it was that had blessed him and elevated him from an ordinary man to a position of authority and power. How often do we children of God do the same? How often do we feel that we no longer need to listen to the minister of God?
3. Have you ever done something you knew was contrary to what God wanted you to, then had to pay much later for the consequences of that sin? Have you ever considered that forgiveness does not cancel out the law of sowing and reaping. What are some sins that you can be forgiven for, but your life will forever be changed by the consequences of the sin?
4. When you compromise your beliefs at school or on the job, do those around you to whom you were a witness beforehand applaud your compromise or simply despise you as a weakling and a hypocrite?
5. Have you ever known anyone who seemed to be living their life for God, then walked away? Do they only partially fail or does Satan seem to destroy the entire relationship they once had with God? When they do not know you are watching, do they seem happy?
6. What are the parts of the armor of God that you think might be removed because of pride or discomfort?
7. It is sometimes hard to remember that the leading of a shepherd implies movement. Have you ever felt like God wanted you to do something different, but you preferred to stay comfortable?
8. Have you ever made the mistake of trying to resist Satan on your own? Is it really conceivable for sheep to confront a lion without the protection of the shepherd?
9. Are the walls of the fold, the restrictions the shepherd has put around us, the church's version of Old Testament Law, put around the sheep to restrict or protect them?
10. Did your struggle with sin and temptation increase or decrease after you started trying to live for God? Did you have more trouble before or after? Why do you think that was?
11. Have you ever looked closely at someone who once lived for God, then walked away from that life to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season? Do they seem happy? Do we have any guarantee that if we leave God's service, we will make it back?