

# The strong man and his goods

(*Matthew 12:29*)

“How can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.”

This is an important parabolic illustration. There are two factors in it — one is the strong man, and the other is his goods. The strong man is mortal mind, and mortal mind necessarily embraces belief in matter, for without matter mortal mind would have no entity. In other words, mortal mind and matter are one, and neither is real, as can be proved by reason and revelation, and it is through reason and revelation that we bind them and dispossess them of their insistent claim to reality. So the strong man stands for all the evidence and teachings based on the material senses and mortal mind. This includes the vast background to all the beliefs of the flesh, the history of error. “Error” may be defined as that which claims to be in opposition to Truth but in fact does not exist, which is what makes the term “error” so apt.

Unless we become aware of the strength of all this in belief, we are not alerted to the fact that our understanding of Principle and its power must exceed the beliefs which mortals entertain both consciously and subconsciously with regard to any particular aspect of mortal life. But if we do become aware of this, then if we have any understanding of Science, we can quickly see that not one of those beliefs has any power, because all of them *are* beliefs and not truths. They are only the goods of the strong man. They are lies from the original liar and they have multiplied in lies, but from beginning to end they are lies.

Jesus referred to this when he showed the Jews whom he was teaching in the temple that they were upholding the claims of the strong man by accepting those claims as real; he said to them, “Ye

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are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." That represents the simple, straightforward way to bind the strong man, and if we speak in this way to all the evidence and teachings of the ages based on material sense, we shall bind it; and having so done, we can then despoil it of any particular so-called goods, or inharmonious effects, with which we are faced in ourselves or in another who has asked us to help him.

Following a paragraph which begins, "Scientifically speaking, there is no mortal mind out of which to make material beliefs, springing from illusion," Mrs Eddy uses as her next marginal heading, "Confirmation in a parable" and quotes this very parable. She says, "Mortal mind is 'the strong man,' which must be held in subjection before its influence upon health and morals can be removed. This error conquered, we can despoil 'the strong man' of his goods, — namely, of sin and disease." (See S&H 399:23-400:8.)

It is mortal mind which claims to be the strong man and from which comes all his goods — sin, disease, and death. Therefore we must know that there is no mortal mind and be clear about this. "All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all" (S&H 468:10-11); this leaves no space for mortal mind. Man is immortal and we are that man, and our universe and all things to do with us are immortal, entirely apart from mortality or the supposed mentality of mortality. There being no mortal mind — no strong man — there are no claims of that mortal mind — no goods of the strong man. It is not sufficient merely to repeat these words. You must understand the truth about which they are words. Keep this truth ever foremost in your thinking and then this so-called strong man and his goods will not enter your experience. Bring all your thinking into line with the truth that there is no mortal mind, since Mind is All-in-all, and your experience will respond accordingly. For instance, if some belief of age suggests itself to you, know that there is no mortal mind and therefore no age to present itself as attached to you

or as part of your thinking or being; nothing of Truth ever began and therefore nothing of Truth will ever end, but always *is*, just as  $2+2=4$  never began and will never end. Go straight for the lie with answers from Truth and if you persist in this course, the lies will lessen their attempt to occupy your thought (you will despoil the strong man of his goods) and instead the truth will occupy it more and more naturally. You will enjoy that state of mind which Jesus enjoyed and which Mrs Eddy described in these words: "With our Master, life was not merely a sense of existence, but an accompanying sense of power that subdued matter and brought to light immortality" (Ret.58:7-9).

The mariner's compass depends for its accuracy on the supreme attraction of the polar magnet for its needle, and we should know that there is only one supreme attraction for man — that which Mrs Eddy refers to as "the polar magnet of Revelation" (S&H 575:27). There is no other real magnetic influence, but we need to understand that nothing exists to detract from this continual purposefulness of good. The ship's navigator has to be alert to counter the deviations and variations which would take him off course, and each one of us has to learn to recognize as errors the general and particular arguments which would take us off a direct, scientific course and even run us onto a rock. For instance, we have to deal with the overall world claims of birth and death and also those special to us.

So the first necessity is to admit that evil is not just a little surface scratching, or a casual phenomenon. It is something which must be dealt with, but in the only way it can be — namely, by a clear recognition that Truth is true and therefore all-powerful. When we acknowledge this, we have bound the strong man, and we are then in a position to despoil him of his goods — to stand up to the lying suggestions which have come to us with regard to our own health or state of being or that of anyone else. We can despoil him of his goods — that is, of any specific claim emanating from that overall claim that matter exists in any degree whatever. Matter and mortal mind combine as one and can never be regarded as separate.

The following statement in the chapter "Christian Science Pract-

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ice" in "Science and Health" shows quite clearly the need to bind the strong man in the treatment of disease: "Because matter has no consciousness or Ego, it cannot act; its conditions are illusions, and these false conditions are the source of all seeming sickness. Admit the existence of matter, and you admit that mortality (and therefore disease) has a foundation in fact. Deny the existence of matter, and you can destroy the belief in material conditions. When fear disappears, the foundation of disease is gone. Once let the mental physician believe in the reality of matter, and he is liable to admit also the reality of all discordant conditions, and this hinders his destroying them. Thus he is unfitted for the successful treatment of disease" (S&H 368:24-4). A few pages later there is a good illustration of the strong man and his goods: "Unless the fever-picture, drawn by millions of mortals and imaged on the body through the belief that mind is in matter and discord is as real as harmony, is destroyed through Science, it may rest at length on some receptive thought, and become a fever case" (S&H 379:29-2). Here through a specific instance Mrs Eddy calls our attention to the need to bind the strong man, first, through recognizing the unreality of matter and its consequent inability to cause or express either health or disease and, secondly, through recognizing that mortal mind does not exist and therefore there can be no discord or disturbance in the consciousness of man. If we do suffer such a thing as a fever, very often in our earnestness we condemn ourselves on the basis that there must be something wrong with our character-expression to have caused it. By seeing clearly that whilst it has come to our door and we possibly in ignorance have let it in, we have not created it and in itself it is only a universal belief which is no part of Truth, it loses its power over us.

"Sin existed as a false claim before the human concept of sin was formed; hence one's concept of error is not the whole of error. . . . The sinner created neither himself nor sin, but sin created the sinner; that is, error made its man mortal, and this mortal was the image and likeness of evil, not of good. Therefore the lie was, and is, collective as well as individual. It was in no way contingent on Adam's thought, but supposititiously self-created. In the words of our Master, it, the

'devil' (*alias* evil), 'was a liar, and the father of it' " (Ret.67:1-3, 18-25). The whole thing is a self-contained non-entity which cannot exist except in imagination. The moment we accept this, it has lost its supposed power over us. Its only power in belief is its claim to be identified with us, to say, "It's you." The strong man's goods are us if we accept his assertions, and weakness is the result. Strength comes the moment we reject them and see that they are not us and are not our fault.

As long as we accept any claim, we are at one with it and subject to it. If we recognize the strong man and bind him, we can then say of any error, "It does not belong to me and I will not have it." Without recognizing and binding this strong man with the strength of our allegiance to Principle, we could find ourselves subject to *its* conditions and *its* goods and also feel that they are our own and that we are responsible for their creation. We are responsible only for our acceptance of them, with its doleful effects, or for our rejection of them, with its good results and enhancing of the strength of character-expression.

Jesus was emphatic in this teaching that we must acknowledge evil as a universal lie and as the originator of all the specific claims, however small or great, which endeavour to make us subject to them. If we accept this teaching, we stand in a clearly defined position where, with our understanding of and fidelity to Principle, we can give the lie to the one liar and then from this position of strength can turn on any specific claim, either in ourselves or in another, and destroy it on the basis that it has no background, no origin, nowhere to come from and nowhere to go to. "Does an evil mind exist without space to occupy, power to act, or vanity to pretend that it is man?" (Mis.173: 17-19)

A soldier is trained in battle school to handle weapons and demonstrate their use, but another demonstration of their handling is on the battlefield. We need to be thoroughly drilled in the recognition of the nothingness of evil and its claim that it has history and background to substantiate it, and we can achieve this only through a clear understanding of the allness of God, good. That clarity of understanding

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comes through such drilling as causing ourselves to understand the seven synonymous terms for God given by Mrs Eddy and their individual purpose. The demonstration of that training as a soldier of God takes place when the belief in evil endeavours in some form to contend with the truths of our being promulgated by the divine Principle which those terms define to us in detail. Mrs Eddy puts the point with her usual directness: "As there is none beside Him, and He is all good, there can be no evil. Simply uttering this great thought is not enough! We must live it, until God becomes the All and Only of our being" (No. 24:27-3).

To take an illustration of the "strong man": say we find that there is someone with whom we cannot get on in any way. As far as we are concerned, everything about this individual is offensive — the things he talks about and upholds, his criticism of others, continual denigration of his country, his constant reference to the body and its treatment through materia medica, and so on. We feel we want to run away from him or at least avoid him. So here we are, faced with the "strong man;" right here the "goods" as far as we are concerned are that this individual takes away our happiness and possibly causes us to form a strong dislike of him and thus to indulge feelings which are the very opposite of what we want. What can we do about it? The first thing is to ask ourselves, "Where has all this evidence come from, and how has it registered with me?" The answer is, "The evidence has originated in mortal mind and has registered with me through the senses, through what I have been hearing and seeing and feeling and also through the bad taste it has given me and the smell or atmosphere it has generated, which is far from having the sweet aroma of pleasantness." So the "strong man" is not the other individual but ourselves in our ignorance and acceptance of the so-called physical senses of seeing, hearing, feeling, etc. But none of those senses has ever told the truth about anything, so where does the truth lie? If we wish to arrive quickly at the truth in this particular instance, we go right over to the truth and say, "This individual is a creation of God, good. He is an expression of God, good. He is immortal, therefore he radiates all the grace of immortality. Here and

now at this very moment Principle is saying of him, 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.'

Taking that stand and knowing that it is the truth — we are not making it true, but it is demanding of us that we come into subjection to it — we are beholding man in Science instead of through the senses. Thereby we find a strength and an enlightenment which can possess our consciousness so that even when sense-testimony is in full play, we are not listening to it, but are seeing its absurdity, its lack of any real existence in the realm of intelligence, to such an extent that we find ourselves *loving* what we are now seeing, glad to be what we really are and to be using the Soul-senses of Principle which are ours to enjoy and exercise. We are now seeing the other individual as he is, hearing the evidence of his individuality as a spiritual being, and we find ourselves realizing without effort that what we have *not* seen through the senses — the decency, the nobility, the love for others — is what really constitutes his being. As we bind the strong man in this way, we find that his goods, the effects upon us and upon him, are destroyed and in their place the effect upon ourselves can be such that we are benefited beyond measure in our understanding of what man is and his purpose in life as the presence of God to the cognizance of others.

The only answer to the question, "Is this practical?" is, "Try it and see. Ignore it and go on suffering in the realm of ignorance. Obey it and all that it means and if you continue in that obedience the time will come when that so-called strong man will no longer have any presence for you, even though the senses may still be upholding the strong man's story." You are then doing what you are equipped to do and enjoying the fruitage which is yours for the taking. In fact, in this way you are letting that Mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Mrs Eddy tells us clearly of this in that well-known passage in "Science and Health": "Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man, who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals." And we should bear in mind how the passage continues: "In this perfect man the Saviour saw God's own likeness, and this correct view of

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man healed the sick” (S&H 476:32-4). If we follow the Master, we shall find our correct view of man healing a sickly acceptance of the mythical senses and healing also the sickly effects which that acceptance would have had.

This illustration applies to all the evidence of the senses in our experience and reveals a clear path of progress towards the realization of what we already are as the presence of God, good, in the very position where we find ourselves.

The only peace there is is a state of consciousness in which we are at war with anything opposed to the allness of Spirit, the allness of God, but in which we are so occupied with that allness of good that we are not conscious of a state of war. In arithmetic the numeration table might be said to be in continual opposition to and therefore warfare with any claim outside its all-inclusive activity, but it is not conscious of war. That is the only peace — when we are so conscious of good that any suggestion of anything else is detected, but immediately destroyed and made nothing.

The strong man appears strong only because of the tenacity of error through the long process of education and history which lets the argument of its strength go unchallenged. When we challenge the claim of strength with Truth, we have bound the strong man and then we can repudiate every false belief which we hold on to in our own thought in a self-willed and self-opinionated way. Instead of upholding the insistence of the strong man, we should silence it and ask ourselves, “What is Principle telling me? Let me listen to Principle and not to anything else.”

Today one of the goods of the strong man is the fear of lack of supply in all directions — commodities, resources, money, friendship. The way to bind the strong man here is to realize that an idea must be continually supplied with all that it needs as an idea to represent the Principle which evolves it, and as man is Principle’s idea, we should bind the strong man of the belief of separation from Principle. There can be no such separation, for “Principle and its idea is one” (S&H 465:17). By cultivating this sense of unity with Principle, as Jesus did unremittingly, we bind the strong man or suggestion of separation or



aloneness and thereby deprive it of all the goods coming under that claim of separateness. Mrs Eddy discerned that the first erroneous postulate of belief is "that substance, life, and intelligence are something apart from God" (S&H 91:25-26). There can be no apartness in the one Being which is God, and therefore if we allow no separation between God and man, we cannot be separated from that which God experiences and expresses. Jesus said, "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that Himself doeth," and he taught us that we are the children of that same Father. Through that realization and obedience to it the fear of lack of supply is gone.

Fear in many other directions tries to dominate thought. If we listen to medical verdicts or listen to the news or listen to anyone who gathers his opinions from the history of matter (the strong man) and we do not deny the error of what we hear, it may cause fear. But if on the other hand we see that error has no basis, no sense, nowhere to come from or power to operate, no system or language through which to manifest itself — that is, there is no strong man — we can thereby belittle its suggestions or arguments to the point of their extinction for us. Fear then has no foundation.

Take the widespread belief that the government of our country — whatever country we live in — is ruining it. We shall never despoil the strong man of these particular goods until we see that the strong man to be dealt with is ourselves — the belief we cling to that there is any other government but Principle's government. When we accept that the only government as far as we are concerned is our own allowing of ourselves to be governed and controlled by Principle, we have bound the strong man and despoiled him of his goods of throwing the blame on others and making excuses for ourselves. Once we have accepted Principle's government as true for us, we have accepted it as true universally.

One of the ways of binding the strong man is to see its inability, that in effect it is *not* a strong man, though announcing itself as such. Goliath proclaimed himself a strong man when opposing David, but one little stone taken from the stream of true reasoning destroyed that arrogance. We need to revise our thinking about evil and see

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that it has no activity. It is only a myth, a lie, and has a sense of activity only to those who endeavour to admit its reality. In itself it has nothing to substantiate or activate it.

We should realize that light flows in through our windows, but no one has ever seen darkness flow anywhere, nor can we find any sense of activity in it as darkness. Darkness never moves. If it exists at all in belief, it is completely inert, waiting only for the first ray of light to prove that even in belief it had no reality. Only a small amount of light is needed to dissipate darkness and it meets no resistance from the darkness. The amount of light which something gives is not gauged by any resistance from the darkness, but by the amount of light *it* has to give. There is no opposition.

Jesus once said to a claim of evil, "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him" (Mark 9:25). He saw the utter inertness of evil, its inability to speak or hear or be active or resistant in any degree or direction. It is wise to cultivate this recognition of Truth and so bind the strong man, not by putting something around an evil to keep it contained, but by seeing that it has no power at all, as David saw when he faced Goliath. The "bands of Soul" (Un.12:5-6) do not bundle up some evil to keep it from being active, but surround it with the reality and onliness of good and therefore dissipate it into its native nothingness. The point of using human argument against the belief in evil is that it takes down the barriers so that the flood-tides of Truth can sweep in and so possess consciousness that all fear and doubt are carried away and we no longer believe that evil exists anywhere or for anyone, even as a claim.

One of the channels of the so-called strong man is ignorance, which is why we should heed the statement, "Error found out is two-thirds destroyed, and the last third pierces itself" (Mis.355:13-15). For instance, the student may be baffled by the term "animal magnetism" and therefore not know how to deal with it. In "Science and Health" is a definition of its use in Christian Science which clarifies thought: "As named in Christian Science, animal magnetism or hypnotism is the specific term for error, or mortal mind. It is the false belief that

mind is in matter, and is both evil and good; that evil is as real as good and more powerful. This belief has not one quality of Truth” (S&H 103:18-23). The fact that it has “not one quality of Truth” makes it plain that this is what we have to realize through scientific reason and revelation. It also shows us that saying, “Animal magnetism cannot affect me, or my friend, or any condition” is incorrect, in that it admits that the animal magnetism does exist. The only correct statement is: “Because animal magnetism and all that the word implies does not exist anywhere or for anyone, it cannot affect me, or my friend, or any condition.” Otherwise it is like saying that the wolf outside the door cannot come in and touch us, which throws open the possibility that if someone opened the door the wolf *would* come in and do some damage. If there is a wolf outside the door, we are never fully safe, and if there is any such thing as animal magnetism, again we are subject to its preying upon us and our defence would only be like keeping the door shut against the wolf which we admitted to be outside. Therefore to know that there is no wolf, or animal magnetism, is our only real safeguard.

In arithmetic we never believe in a cloud of mistakes hovering round every schoolroom, first attracting and then occupying the thoughts of the pupils. If such a suggestion came to a teacher, he would dismiss it as ridiculous and get on with teaching the rules of arithmetic. “God’s law is in three words, ‘I am All’ ” (No.30:11), and if we admit that there is anything else besides All, then God is not God in the true sense of the definition of God as Principle and we are not protected by the law. This law, “I am All,” does not protect us *against* something real, but through our admission of it protects us against believing that there is something from which we have to be protected. Abide in God’s law of “I am All” and you abide in perfect safety. Admit the existence of error and you may be caught out by it at any time.

Eastern philosophy is expressed in the three monkeys who see, hear, and speak no evil. To adopt that outlook is like putting ourselves in a monastery against a given and acknowledged error which we then try not to acknowledge. That is the opposite of Science. We cannot be

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blind to the belief in evil, but must specifically let its nothingness be demonstrated.

Only by cultivating the understanding of what God is can we keep from falling into these traps of making too much or too little of the strong man. The most subtle trap is the belief that we have to develop good in order to overcome evil, rather than overcome the belief that evil exists. Our understanding of good is only in the ratio of our growing certainty that there is nothing opposed to it and no evil to overcome. "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon" in Revelation, but as Mrs Eddy comments, "The Gabriel of His presence has no contests" (S&H 567:6-7). The "atmosphere of God," which is the divine definition of Science given in "No and Yes" (9:25-26), has nothing in it that is controversial or against its mandate, and there is nothing outside it, because there is no "outside" to the consciousness which is God.

The recognition of this was what bound the strong man for Mrs Eddy. Evil had seemed very real to her until she read Matthew 9:2 and saw that Jesus' consciousness was not bound by the belief of evil. Through reading his words to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," she glimpsed what lay behind that consciousness of the Master which enabled him to give no reality to sin. She tells us that she glimpsed "Life in and of Spirit; this Life being the sole reality of existence" (Mis.24:17-18) — without an opposite.

The only light there is is that to which there is no darkness and nothing to overcome. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." So finally we bind the strong man by refreshing our concept of what God is. God is not a contender against an opposite. The strong man is the belief that there is something opposed to God — the belief in an opposite to good. If we bind that, we can despoil it of all its goods — eliminate any specific offshoots of the one basic belief with the specific answers from Principle. That is the promise, that is the rule.

When anyone clears his thinking in this manner, in this loyalty to Principle, he will feel and find that it is actually Principle's presence

which is taking him along with it — that he has come into the experience of God's presence, power, and peace, which "meet all human needs and reflect all bliss" (Mis.263:12-14). In fact, he has learnt that the only thing going on is God and His all-knowing and that he as an individual is some part of that knowing; and this realization for himself will cause him to realize that the same is true for all others.