

# VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL 2023

## “Be Strong in the Lord”



2010 DAWN BOOTH

## Lesson 1: Taking Up the Whole Armor of God

*Paul tells us to take up the whole armor of God. But what is this armor, and how do we put it on? Is it still relevant for Christians today?*

Paul, an apostle of God's first-century Church, has a story for us today: Accused of sedition, beaten, arrested, almost assassinated, shipwrecked, attacked by a snake and placed under house arrest: Most would call this list an unfortunate run of bad luck. Paul would recognize it as just part of his job description.

Imprisoned in Rome for two years under the watchful eyes of Roman soldiers, Paul was able to write four epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) and continue preaching "the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" to all those who came to hear him (Acts 28:30-31).

Living for two years with soldiers of the Roman army must have made an impression on Paul. Likely he saw the soldiers' armor enough to become well acquainted with it, learned to understand the function of each piece, what purpose it served and why it was important.

At some point, a God-inspired analogy began to form in Paul's mind. Just as the Roman soldiers required physical armor to fight their wars, we Christians require spiritual armor to successfully fight ours. As the pieces fell into place, Paul saw that each piece of Roman armor had a powerful correlation with our own spiritual defenses. It is this analogy that the church in Ephesus received and which God has preserved for two thousand years for our benefit.



### ***What Do We Need Armor for, Anyway?***

We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

How?

How is it that, as Christians, we are expected to withstand incredible pressures and not be defeated? How can we possibly stand up against everything the world has to throw at us and still expect to emerge victorious?

The answer lies not in ourselves, but in a divine and unbeatable defense: the armor of God.

## What is the armor of God?

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The armor of God is an amazing metaphor for action we need to take in our spiritual lives. Paul sets the scene for us: We are fighting a war, and the stakes are higher than they have ever been in human history.

Our enemy? Not flesh and blood, no human foe—we fight against a much more fearsome opponent whose forces are described in Ephesians 6:12. Our adversary, Satan the devil, and his host of demons have a single, driving purpose: Obliterate the children of God.

Faced with the cares of this world, we can easily forget about the severity of this battle. But make no mistake: Our spiritual lives and future in God's Kingdom are on the line. If we lose this war, we lose everything. What can we do in the face of such overwhelming odds? Is there any hope?

Paul has the answer. In Ephesians 6:13, he gives the call to arms. By putting on all of God's armor, which we will be exploring piece by piece in the following lessons, we can be assured of withstanding our enemy's onslaughts.

### Are there any other references to this armor in the Bible?

Isaiah 59:17

For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

Yes! Though the passages may not explicitly call it the armor of God, there are sections of the Bible that further elaborate on the topic—even in the Old Testament! Isaiah 59:17 refers to two familiar pieces of armor—the helmet and the breastplate—and introduces two other pieces—the clothes of vengeance and cloak of zeal.

We won't be looking at the clothes of vengeance, since they belong exclusively to God (Hebrews 10:30). The cloak of zeal, however, is an interesting study and one we'll be spending some time reviewing.

***Romans 13:11-14***

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Paul admonishes the Romans to put on both the "armor of light" and "the Lord Jesus Christ." This passage reveals both that wearing the armor of God is synonymous with having the character of God and that this armor cannot be worn if we are still wearing the "works of darkness"—a lifestyle of sin that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2).

***2 Corinthians 6:7***

...by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left...

***2 Corinthians 10:3-6***

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

In these passages Paul calls it the armor of righteousness and reveals its purpose. We put on the armor and strength of God to effectively wage war against our enemy, the devil. Without it, we are helpless—but with it, we are soldiers of the living God, and "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

## Lesson 2: The Belt of Truth

The first piece of armor Paul mentions in Ephesians 6:14 is "the belt of truth" (New International Version). What purpose did the belt serve for a Roman soldier? What purpose does the belt of truth serve for us?



Discovery Channel's *Mythbusters* interviewed Deputy Shawn Osborne, whose standard-issue belt buckle deflected a bullet at close range, saving his life. In spite of a big bruise, Deputy Osborne knew he was "very lucky." Belt buckles are not designed to stop bullets. But there was a time when belts were an important part of defensive armor.

### **Girded With Truth**

When the apostle Paul describes the armor of God, he is talking about more than a simple set of helpful tips. He is talking about the impregnable defenses of the Almighty God. These are keys to withstanding the attacks and onslaughts of the great dragon of old, Satan the devil. They are ultimate and infinitely powerful tools available to us as Christians.

And he chooses to begin describing that set of armor by talking about...a belt?

Why, of all things, a belt? He could have started with the mighty sword of the Spirit, the towering shield of faith, the shining breastplate of righteousness—anything but some measly old belt. But he didn't. So that begs the question—why?

### **What was the belt used for in the Roman army?**

The belt—known as the *cingulum* or *balteus*—played a crucial role in the effectiveness of a soldier's armor. It was the belt that held the scabbard, without which there would be no place to put a sword. Imagine an overzealous soldier, fired up and charging out into battle—but without his belt, and consequently without a weapon!

In addition, the Nelson Study Bible says from the belt "hung strips of leather to protect the lower body." The Matthew Henry Commentary says the belt "girds on [secures] all the other pieces of our armor." Truth should cleave to us as a belt cleaves to our body.

### **What is truth?**

John 17:17

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Jesus, praying to the Father, gives a clear and straightforward definition of truth: God's Word. The Holy Bible (Scripture—the word of truth) was given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Greek expression translated "inspiration of God" literally means "God-breathed"! He actively and fully inspired the Bible to reveal His truth to us.

His promises, His commands, His word—they are all truth, plain and simple. After all, "The LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27). If God says something, there is no force that can stop Him from doing it—we can rest assured that it will be done.

## What does truth have to do with a belt?

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Test all things; hold fast what is good.

As Christians, we are to test all things and then hold on only to that which is good—the truth—discarding all else. We are to be like the Bereans who "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). If we are not convinced that our principles and beliefs are without exception 100 percent true, how can we expect to accomplish anything?

Proverbs 3:3-4

Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

A belt encompasses the waist. Does our conviction to the truth encompass us? As the above scripture notes, truth must be bound around us and written on our hearts—our conviction must reach beyond an outward show.

The belt used in Roman armor, as we have learned, provided a place for the soldier's sword. Our sword—the sword of the Spirit—likewise needs a sheath. Truth is vital because, like a Roman soldier's belt, it allows us to carry the sword of the Spirit and use it effectively.

## What other lessons can we learn from the biblical analogy of having our waist "girded" by a belt?

***Luke 12:35-37***

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.

Christ told us to always be watching and ready for His return.

1 Peter 1:13

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...Peter used an interesting analogy: "Gird up the loins of your mind."

This implies tucking in long garments to be ready to move quickly. The New International Version translates it as "prepare your minds for action."

## What are the dangers of not wearing the belt?

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The world we live in teaches that truth is what we make it—that good and bad are relative and that there are no absolutes, only equally valid opinions. But the Bible teaches that truth is God's Word—that good and bad are defined by Him and that there are eternal and unchangeable absolutes, uninfluenced by opinions.

Paul wrote to the Romans telling them to "not be conformed to this world." Part of that means not buying into a system of belief that says absolute truth is a myth. As Christians, we know both that there is truth and that it is absolute.

### ***2 Timothy 2:15***

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Imagine a belt with a segment missing. No matter how tiny the sliver that isn't there, the belt is still useless. To do its job, it must be one continuous, unbroken piece.

Now imagine living a way of life you don't completely agree with. Maybe it doesn't seem like a big deal—after all, what are a couple minor points that you're not sure about?

They are everything. To try to live God's way without total belief in its validity is like trying to hold your sword up with a belt that isn't continuous. Neither will work. Our trust in God and His Word must be solid, without break, or else we will quickly find ourselves without a weapon. No matter how effective the rest of our armor is, we are useless without our sword. We need to be rightly dividing the word of truth—knowing what we believe, and why.

So—how secure is your belt?

### Lesson 3: The Breastplate of Righteousness

The second piece of armor Paul mentions in Ephesians 6:14 is "the breastplate of righteousness." Why is the breastplate important—for both ancient soldiers and us?

A lesson from ancient Israel provides an ironic example of just how important armor can be. Perhaps you recall the cowardly and capricious life of King Ahab, but how did this evil king's life come to an end? This selfish leader who allowed a man to be killed just so he could have his vineyard (1 Kings 21)?

This king of Israel "who did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:30, New Revised Standard Version)?

God had prophesied that Ahab would die in the battle described in 1 Kings 22. So Ahab decided to disguise himself, while his ally King Jehoshaphat of Judah wore his own kingly robes.

Their enemy had ordered his captains, "'Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel.'" When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, 'It is surely the king of Israel.' So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out. When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.

"But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate...at evening he died; the blood from the wound had flowed into the bottom of the chariot" (1 Kings 22:31-35, NRSV).

Is it perhaps poetic justice that this unrighteous king lost his life due to an opening in his armor?

#### ***Putting on Righteousness***

Facing the hordes of Satan, you brace yourself and pray. The hosts of your enemy share a collective, malicious grin, waiting for the command to do their worst.

The battle cry sounds. They begin their charge; you tighten your grip on your sword and raise your shield. Weapons begin swinging with unrivaled fury; you do your best to parry the onslaught, but there are too many weapons to block. Eventually, you watch as one of your opponent's swords begins making a clean arc that continues right past your shield and toward your chest.

You brace yourself, preparing for the worst and expecting your quick demise, watching the weapon move ever closer to you as time slows to a maddening crawl—waiting, waiting, when CLANG! The reverberating noise of the sword striking your breastplate pierces the air. Shaking your head in disbelief, you look down to find that the breastplate of righteousness stopped the deadly blow in its tracks. Delivered by righteousness and with renewed vigor, you plunge back into the fight.





## ***Armor of God: The Breastplate of Righteousness***

### **What purpose does a breastplate serve?**

The breastplate was a central part of the Roman soldier's armor—it provided protection for the torso, which contains vital organs like the heart, lungs and so on. Without a breastplate, a soldier would be asking for death, as any attack could instantly become fatal. With a sturdy breastplate, the very same attacks become ineffective and useless, as blows glance off the armor.

Why is righteousness associated with protective armor like a breastplate?

Proverbs 11:4

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. Without righteousness, we leave ourselves open to almost certain death. With righteousness—just as with a breastplate—the otherwise fatal attacks of our enemy are thwarted.

What is righteousness?

Psalm 119:172

My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

1 John 3:4

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

1 Corinthians 15:34

Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

To be righteous is to do what is right in God's eyes. God's commandments are righteousness. In contrast, lawlessness is sin, and sin is the opposite of righteousness. So to be righteous is to obey God's laws of love.

What separates us from God, causing Him to withhold His protection?

Isaiah 59:1-2

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Iniquities and sins are actions and thoughts that go against God's laws. Since they are in conflict with God's way of living and are harmful to ourselves and others, our perfect and just God will not associate with us if we go down the path of sin and evil. We cut ourselves off from God and His protection!

It is interesting to note that in this same chapter Isaiah mentions that God Himself puts on righteousness as a breastplate (Isaiah 59:17), which may be part of what inspired Paul to use this analogy.

### ***Whose righteousness should we be wearing?***

Isaiah 64:6

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Righteousness may deliver from death, but whose righteousness are we talking about? The above scripture makes it clear that our individual level of righteousness is on par with "filthy rags"—and when you're looking to protect yourself from death, filthy rags make for a lousy breastplate.

Jeremiah 23:6

In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Also consider scriptures such as Job 36:3; Psalm 5:8; 23:3; 24:5; and 71:16, which show that true righteousness comes from God. It is God's righteousness, and not our own, which must serve as our breastplate and defense against Satan.

### ***What other characteristics does Paul compare with a breastplate?***

1 Thessalonians 5:8

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

Faith and love also protect our hearts. It's interesting to study how faith and love relate to righteousness. Faith works "through love" (Galatians 5:6) and Abraham's faith (which was shown by his doing what God said to do) was "accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3; Genesis 26:5). As the Jamieson, Fausset and Brown commentary puts it: "'Faith,' as the motive within, and 'love,' exhibited in outward acts, constitute the perfection of righteousness" (note on 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

### **How do I wear the breastplate of righteousness?**

Ephesians 6:13

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

So now we know what the breastplate of righteousness is. Paul gives us the command to "take up the whole armor of God"—the obvious question is, "How?"

An in-depth concordance study of all the scriptures concerning righteousness (there are 301 in the New King James Version!) reveals that servants of God in the Bible who had righteousness all had it because they followed God's way.

Though it may seem a sweeping statement, it is through a continuing and dedicated adherence to both the letter and spirit of God's law that we can defend ourselves with His righteousness.

Once we have put on the breastplate of righteousness, we must be sure not to remove it. Ezekiel 33:13 shows that wearing righteousness is not a one-time event; rather, it requires a lifetime of action.

One day, the war we're fighting will be over. And when it is, we are promised, "The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever" (Isaiah 32:17). By faithfully living God's way and staying clear of Satan's, we will find this peace, quietness and assurance—forever.

## **Lesson 4: The Shoes of the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace**

The third piece of armor Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 is the shoes of “the preparation of the gospel of peace.” What purpose did shoes serve for a Roman soldier? What purpose do these spiritual shoes serve for us?

The brethren gathered around, desperately trying to convince Paul to abandon his plans to travel to Jerusalem. They had heard the prophecies about the fate that awaited him on this journey—Paul himself said that he did not know what to expect, “except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (Acts 20:23). Paul’s brethren and fellow workers couldn’t bear the thought of their friend willingly walking into this, and begged him to reconsider.

But God, through His Holy Spirit, had summoned Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22)—and Paul was intent on answering that call. Knowing that the upcoming trip could very well mean the end of his life, he says to his would-be dissuaders, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

Paul did not just write about the armor of God; he also wore it. At this time in his life he was able to call upon the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace. He found protection and strength in the knowledge of what God’s gospel meant for him and for the others he shared that good news with. His footing was sure and unshakable, and he was prepared to carry the gospel wherever God sent him.

### **Shod With the Gospel of Peace**

Shoes, like the belt, may initially seem superfluous in a discussion about spiritual armor. They’re great to have, sure, but aren’t they more of a convenience than a necessity? Are they really that important?

In this lesson, we’ll learn why our spiritual shoes matter and why we need to make sure we’re equipped with them before we get onto the battlefield.

### **What purpose do shoes serve?**

### **Armor of God: The Shoes of the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace**

Imagine a fully armed soldier. He has his sword, his shield, his helmet, his breastplate and his belt...but his feet are completely bare. The picture probably seems strange, and it should! Just by thinking about it, we can tell something is missing.



But the problem goes beyond just looking odd. A shoeless soldier could run into real trouble in the heat of battle. Unless he is fighting on Astroturf, he is going to encounter some debris. It may be nothing more than twigs and pebbles, but to a bare foot that can cause serious pain—and one of the last things you want to deal with in the middle of a fight is worrying about where you step.

In short, shoes allow us to step freely and without fear while we turn our full attention to the battle at hand.

What is the gospel of peace? Are there different gospels in the Bible?  
Matthew 4:23

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Mark 1:1

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.  
Mark 1:14

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God...

Acts 20:24

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Romans 10:15

And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!”

The gospel of the Kingdom, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of peace—these are some of descriptions attached to the word gospel throughout the New Testament. Do all these different qualifiers mean that there are multiple gospels set forth in the Bible?

No. The Greek word translated gospel—euangelion—simply means “good news.” This raises a question: The good news of what? The first description used in the Gospels also summarizes all the others: The gospel of the Kingdom. The good news of the Kingdom of God includes the good news about Jesus Christ the King, His grace (unmerited pardon) and His plan of salvation for all mankind. This plan gives us peace now, and will bring peace to the whole world! This is the message God’s people are eager to share with others. Our loving Father is preparing us all for a future beyond imagination and description.

**What does the gospel of peace have to do with shoes?**

Romans 10:14-15

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!”

God’s Church is sent to announce the good news of God’s Kingdom, which will spread His way of peace around the whole world. Having our shoes on, we are ready to move, to spread these glad tidings to others.

In the Apostle Paul’s day, he walked countless miles in delivering the good news. Today, transportation and communication have changed, but we must also be constantly ready to do our part to spread the good news.

Romans 3:17

And the way of peace they have not known.

In spite of all human attempts at peace, it’s clear from the daily news reports that this world does not know the road to peace.

1 John 2:6

He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Following Christ’s steps is the way to real peace.

### **How do these spiritual shoes help us stand firm?**

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The sandals of the Roman soldier “often were fitted with nails, or armed with spikes, to make the hold firm in the ground” (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible). God’s good news and our mission—our marching orders—to preach it serve as our firm foundation. When we truly allow ourselves to take comfort in the good news promised by God, there is nothing from outside ourselves that can trouble our hearts or give us reason to be afraid. Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33), and so we have nothing to fear from it.

Luke 10:19-20

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Just as shoes allow us to walk on otherwise painful terrain without fear, so the preparation of the gospel of peace allows us to traverse the otherwise painful trials and tribulations of life without fear, knowing that what awaits is greater than anything we could possibly suffer in this world (Romans 8:18).

### **Why is it called a gospel of peace?**

Isaiah 2:2-4

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His

paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

**Isaiah 9:6-7**

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

The Bible makes it clear that, when God’s Kingdom is established and the entire world begins to live God’s way faithfully, the resulting peace will be universal. There will be no more war or fear, only the worldwide peace that comes from God’s way of life.

## Lesson 5: The Shield of Faith

The fourth piece of armor Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 is “the shield of faith.” How did Roman soldiers use their shields? What purpose does a spiritual shield serve for us?

The Bible, in Daniel 3, records the story of the burning fiery furnace:

The three young men stood looking at the very site where they were to be put to death. The edict had gone out—they were to be thrown, alive and bound, into a furnace heated to seven times its usual fervor. Everyone watching understood: This was an execution. This was what happened when you disobeyed the king.

Just moments ago, the three men had been given the chance to circumvent this ugly fate. With little more than a few motions on their part, they could have saved their own lives. But they refused. Why?

The king had previously set up a 90-foot-high golden statue. At various times throughout the day, which were to be prompted by music, he commanded that his people fall down and worship this statue. Out of the entire nation, we are given the names of only three men who had the courage to stand against this royal decree. And for that courage, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were going to die.

When King Nebuchadnezzar became aware of their insubordination, he summoned the rebels and gave them an ultimatum: Worship the statue or be thrown into a fiery furnace. Their response is preserved for us in Daniel 3:16-18. “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.’”

The faith of these three men in God allowed them to stand up to the world’s most powerful man and refuse to follow his blasphemous orders. They were then thrown into the furnace and miraculously delivered unharmed by God. But perhaps the most amazing thing about their story is their unwavering dedication to God in the face of an unknown outcome. Their faith was strong enough to accept giving their lives!

### How can we have that faith? Taking the Shield

Up until now, Paul’s description of the armor of God has been limited to items we wear. We put on the belt, the breastplate and the shoes, and they essentially hold themselves up.





The shield is different. Paul tells us that the shield is something we must take up, something we are required to raise. Just strapping it to our arm won't do any good at all if we don't make the effort to hold it aloft and use it.

## **How did the shield work in the Roman army?**

### ***Armor of God: The Shield of Faith***

The Roman shield—the scutum—was not the standard “medieval-esque” shield most picture in their minds upon hearing the word. It was instead a very large, slightly curved rectangular shield featuring at its center a large metal knob (called a boss).

The scutum was an impressive line of defense. Because of its sheer size (some were three and a half feet tall and almost three feet wide), soldiers were afforded a great deal of protection from enemies. Because of its slight curve, it was able to deflect attacks without transferring the full force of the assault to the man holding the shield. Because of its boss, it was able to deflect even the more vicious blows and function in a limited offensive capacity as a means of knocking an opponent backwards.

## **What is faith?**

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Here is a biblical definition of faith that clears up some common misconceptions. If faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” then this has far-reaching implications. Substance is tangible, and evidence is solid proof. Faith is, by definition, not some hazy emotion without any grounding in reality. It is the irrefutable truth. It is real.

Romans 8:24-25

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Though it is based on solid evidence, that doesn't mean faith comes naturally or easily. Paul here makes the obvious but necessary point: You don't hope for what you already have. Faith involves a huge element of trust. We must examine the evidence and see that God has proved Himself to be unchanging and consistent, and then we must firmly believe that He will fulfill His promises to us.

## **Where does living, saving faith come from?**

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...

1 Corinthians 12:9

...to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit...

While we must believe God to even begin our walk with Him, after repentance and baptism He gives us a deeper, living, growing faith through His Holy Spirit.

## **Why is a shield associated with faith?**

### Daniel 3:17-18

If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

A shield guards. While a physical shield protects us physically, faith can protect our spiritual lives even in the middle of physical trials. When Satan (through Nebuchadnezzar) attacked the values and beliefs of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, they were able to stand resolute and unwavering because of their faith. In their response, they essentially said, “God is capable of delivering us from this fate. We don’t know if He will or not, but that doesn’t matter. He gave us His commands, and we are going to keep them regardless of the physical outcome. We know He can just as easily raise us from the dead.”

### Ephesians 6:16

...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

A shield deflects. Satan is always hurling his fiery darts of fear, doubt and worry in our direction, but the only time they can hit us is when we let our shield of faith down—when we stop believing that God is in control; that He is working everything out for our good; that whatever happens is for the ultimate best of everyone involved, however little it seems to be that way.

### Matthew 14:28-31

And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

A shield is the first line of defense. While the rest of our armor helps protect us from Satan’s onslaught, it is not what you ideally want to be using to absorb every hit. You do not, for instance, go out into battle intentionally blocking everything with your head.

When our faith in God’s omnipotence and care is strong, it is impossible for Satan to break through our shield and land an attack. But when we allow doubt to creep in, as Peter did when distracted by the waves, we will start to sink. The rest of our armor will be battered, and so will we. But an actively raised shield of faith prevents this otherwise inhibiting fatigue.

### Matthew 4:10-11

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

A shield can incapacitate. When Christ was being tempted by Satan, His faith in the Word and commands of God repelled Satan for a time (Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Christ was tempted in all things, so this was certainly not the only encounter Christ had with the devil). The boss (the metal knob in the middle) on the Roman shields allowed soldiers to give their enemies a stunning shove that would allow them to follow through with an attack. Our faith in God, as demonstrated by Christ, can also give Satan a good shove backwards and give us a chance to

fight back by doing God's will and work. Because God tells us that faith cannot just be in our minds, it must produce actions—works of obedience and service (James 2:20).

### **How else can the shield be used?**

The Roman military had an inventive and very effective tactic that made use of their large shields. When enemies would begin firing arrows and other projectiles at the army, the soldiers would close ranks into a rectangular array—called the *testudo*, or “tortoise,” formation—and those on the outside would use their shields to create a wall around the perimeter. Then those in the middle would raise their shields over their heads to protect everyone from airborne missiles. The result was a formidable human tank that could be stopped only through a tremendous effort.

Ephesians 4:11-16

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

When the Roman army joined its shields together, it became an almost unstoppable force. And if we in God's Church join our shields—that is, strengthen each other with our faith, building up and serving within the Body as we are able—we will become an unstoppable force able to take on any challenge.

We must remember as we fight that this is not simply our battle. This is the battle of all our brethren, both near and around the world. And if we are to win, it will only be once we put our faith in God and stand side by side, contending earnestly and as one for “our common salvation...the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

## Lesson 6: Helmet of Salvation

In Ephesians 6, Paul talks about the “helmet of salvation” as part of the armor of God. What exactly does the Bible mean by salvation, and why is it portrayed as a helmet? It’s hard to deny the importance of a helmet.

The Lansing State Journal ran an article on June 23, 2009, about a 36-year-old involved in a skateboarding accident:

“It was a death that could have been avoided, officials said. “Paul Maxim, who was not wearing a helmet, suffered a skull fracture and other head injuries in an accident June 18 at Ranney Skate Park near Frandor. He died Saturday.

“A simple helmet would have saved his life,’ said Lansing fire public information officer Steve Mazurek.”

This story stands in stark contrast with an article that appeared in the Manchester Evening News on July 4, 2008:

“Savannah Haworth, 11, was knocked unconscious after falling into the path of the car. “The wheels went over her arm and top of her helmet but she escaped with a swollen elbow and bruising to her face.

“Her parents say she would have been killed without the helmet and are now urging all cyclists to wear them.”

It’s incredible to think that the absence or presence of a helmet can make so much of a difference that a skateboarding accident can prove fatal without one while being run over by a car can be survived with one. One of the pieces of our spiritual armor is the helmet of salvation, and, as we can see from these two stories, a helmet is not a piece of equipment to be underestimated.

### **Taking the Helmet Armor of God: Helmet of Salvation**

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the helmet of salvation, some of them may have found the analogy to be a familiar one. In the book of Isaiah, a description of God shows Him as having put on both the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation (Isaiah 59:17).

In referencing this Old Testament scripture, Paul drives home the point that it is in every sense of the word the armor of God—the same armor He Himself wears. But it also leads us to consider what salvation is, what it has to do with a helmet and what it means for us.

### **What purpose did the helmet serve in the Roman army?**

The Roman helmet, like helmets today, protected the head from the attacks of the enemy. There is some evidence to suggest that the Romans had special ceremonial helmets used in parades that denoted rank and standing.



## **What is salvation?**

Salvation basically means to be saved or delivered from something (see examples in Exodus 14:13 and Micah 7:6-8). In the New Testament, as we will see, it is generally used to refer to deliverance from the eternal death penalty of sin and deliverance into God's Kingdom.

## **What is the penalty of our sins, and how can we be saved from that penalty?**

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8-10

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

1 Timothy 2:3-4

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Luke 1:77

To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins...

Every human being has thought and acted in ways that are abominable to God. Our sins break God's beautiful living laws designed for our good. Sin is so vile to God that it requires the death penalty. God's justice requires that penalty. But God's loving mercy provided the most incredible substitute. Jesus Christ, our Creator, was willing to die in our place!

To be saved, we need a Savior.

## **How do we receive salvation?**

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

It is important to understand that salvation cannot be earned. It is a gift from God and not something we can obtain through the right actions, thus obligating God to give it to us.

Still, as we've seen in the scriptures covered so far, repentance (abhorring our sins and seeking God's forgiveness and help to obey His laws), faith, accepting Christ's sacrifice and coming to the knowledge of the truth are all steps in accepting the free gift. In no way do these efforts make up for our sins that caused the death of our Creator and Savior!

## **Is salvation a permanent, irrevocable gift, or does it have to be maintained?**

The New Testament tells us that we "have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5), that we "are being saved" (1 Corinthians 1:18) and that we "will be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

### **What does this mean for us?**

Ephesians 2:4-8

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...

Paul makes it clear that "have been saved" equates to the forgiveness of sins and coming under God's grace. We have been taken off death row.

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Salvation can also describe the ongoing conversion process. Paul also calls this being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). This involves having God's laws written in our minds and meditating on them so we can better follow them (Hebrews 10:16; Psalm 119:97-99). As we saw in the lesson on the breastplate of righteousness, God expects us to obey His commandments.

Matthew 10:22

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Our ultimate salvation depends on whether or not we choose to endure to the end.

### **What does salvation have to do with a helmet?**

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

We can receive tremendous hope and comfort by focusing on the incredible sacrifice Christ gave to save us and the amazing Kingdom that is the goal of our salvation. This hope works like a helmet to protect our minds from the discouragement and despair in this world.

John 17:15-16

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Christians have been called out of this world. Though we remain in it, we are not of it and remain separate from it. Our way of living and even of thinking should differ from the world's. We are to develop the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), and as we have seen, that means having God's laws written on our hearts and minds so we can remember to always obey God.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Our enemy hates that we have chosen this path and will stop at nothing to destroy us because of it. Just as the helmet protects the vital but vulnerable head from otherwise fatal blows, the hope of salvation can protect our thoughts from our enemy's attacks and temptations to disobey God.

Matthew 13:22

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Without the helmet of salvation, we will be unprotected from the "cares of this world" that bombard our thoughts and feelings. Imagine not knowing what the future ultimately holds. The worries and problems produced by living in this world would overwhelm us!

Psalms 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

With the helmet securely fastened, we can have the same confidence that Paul did that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). We understand that it doesn't matter what happens to us now. No matter what trials we face, we know that at the end of it all waits God's Kingdom and an eternity of His perfect reign—and what could be better than that?

### **How do I keep the helmet secure?**

Psalms 3:8

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah.

Remember that salvation comes from God, and that God is on our side. If we commit to fully follow and obey Him, it is impossible for us to lose our battle or our salvation.

Revelation 21:1-4

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

This is the salvation we are fighting for—to enter this glorious Kingdom! Never lose sight of this. This coming Kingdom, with its worldwide peace and prosperity, makes every price in this life worth paying. No matter what comes, no matter how vicious the attacks our enemy lands on us, we know that as long as we remain with God, we are moving slowly but unstoppably toward an eternal victory. What wouldn't we give for that?

### **2 Timothy 4:6-8**

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Paul had the vision. He valued his salvation highly and diligently fought the good fight. As the end of his life drew near, he was able to say with complete confidence that he would receive the crown.

When Paul awakes in the first resurrection, he will trade in his soldier's helmet for a far more glorious, imperishable and eternal crown of righteousness—the crown of a victorious soldier of Christ. We, too, can be assured of victory so long as we—like Paul—faithfully follow our God and His commandments from our heart and mind.



## Lesson 7: The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God

The sixth piece of armor Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” How does a Roman soldier’s sword help us understand how to use the Bible to win our spiritual battles?

The Bible, in Judges 7, records the story of Gideon and his 300 men:

Gideon and 32,000 Israelite troops gathered near the Midianite camp, but they were severely outnumbered by their 135,000 oppressors. Gideon was ready to do battle, but God had other plans. He was about to show His people just how powerful a God He was.

God told Gideon to let anyone who was afraid of the upcoming battle return home. Twenty-two thousand men took the opportunity to leave their ranks, leaving only 10,000 remaining. But God was looking for a smaller group still.



God then told Gideon to have the remainder drink from the spring, and all those who lapped the water like a dog would remain, while the rest were sent home. Finally, with only 300 men, Gideon and his little army surrounded the Midianites. On signal they blew trumpets, broke the pitchers covering their torches and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” (Judges 7:20).

Then the unthinkable happened. These 300 men—holding not swords, but torches and trumpets—routed the entire Midianite camp. Scripture records that God “set every man’s sword against his companion throughout the whole camp” (Judges 7:22). So before the Israelites even had a chance to reach for swords, God plunged the enemy camp into chaos and wild defeat. The Israelites were delivered from their foes by a miracle.

This famous story illustrates an invaluable lesson: It is God who gives the victory. His sword is what will deliver us.

### Taking the Sword

Throughout the world, there are certain individuals—real and fictional—whose identity remains almost inseparable from their weapon of choice.

From England, there is King Arthur and his sword, Excalibur. From the Middle East, Ali and his scimitar, Zulfiqar. From Spain, El Cid and his long sword, Tizona. From Scotland, William Wallace and his unnamed claymore.

The sword is the only item listed by Paul that serves in an offensive capacity. Even if we have all the rest of the armor equipped perfectly, without our sword, we amount to little more than heavily armored moving targets.

## **Armor of God: The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God**

Perhaps this is why we remember the name of King Arthur's sword and not, for example, his footwear. While the rest of the armor is undoubtedly vital, it is the sword and only the sword that allows us to attack—to directly do the work that needs to be done.

### **What purpose did the sword serve in the Roman army?**

The Roman gladius has become known as “the sword that conquered the world.” Adapted from a Spanish design, the prowess of the gladius in close range combat made it a fearsome tool in the hand of a skilled Roman warrior. When sharpened, its dual edges wreaked havoc on unarmored foes, while its tapered point could pierce through even heavy metal armor.

A Roman infantryman would go into battle armed with more than just his gladius. He would also have a dagger (pugio), several one-time use spears (pila) and lead-weighted darts (plumbatae), but the sword was his main means of attack. The sword is the only weapon Paul lists as part of the Christian arsenal.

### **What is the Word of God?**

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

God's Word—the Holy Bible—illuminates. It reveals to us the good and the bad, the wise and the unwise. It is the ultimate tool in learning how to live the best possible life, free from the restraints of stumbling in darkness.

John 17:17

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

God's Word is truth, plain and simple. We can have perfect confidence in the fact that His words are accurate, true and unerring. When followed, they guide us without fail in the paths that we need to walk.

We can be destroyed by lack of the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:6), but we will be blessed if we hear and keep the Word of God (Luke 11:28). And the knowledge is not just for us. We are to be ready to answer others who ask us (1 Peter 3:15).

### **Why a sword?**

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The all-powerful sword of the living God is able to cut through every defense our enemy can raise—down to the very division of bone and marrow. When wielded by a servant of God, nothing can withstand its ability to cut straight to the core of a matter and uncover the truth. As soldiers in God's army, it is our responsibility and duty to use His Word to discern the truth and then follow it. When God's Word shows us something wrong in ourselves, we can use this spiritual weapon to “surgically” remove the offending thoughts and actions (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Unlike all other pieces of the armor of God, which are solely defensive, the sword is uniquely suited for both defensive and offensive roles. A solid defense is invaluable, but the sword is the only way we can complete the work we have been given to do.

Notice that Jesus Christ used the Bible to counter Satan's attacks (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). We must also learn to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Swords are used for close combat, not long-range warfare. Could this imply the nature of the battle a Christian fights?

Acts 14:22

...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The Romans relied in part on assailing their enemy from a distance with javelins and darts, but God does not give us that option as Christian soldiers. If we were able to fight our battles from a distance, we would never experience an actual trial.

At first glance, that might not seem like such a bad thing. But when we stop to consider that without trials, there is no growth, and without growth, we will not be able to enter God's Kingdom, we see that trials, however uncomfortable, are essential in our journeys as Christians. After all, the promises of Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26 and 3:5, 12 and 21 are given "to him who overcomes" and not "to him who remains as he is."

Paul only lists one weapon because we only need one weapon: There is no enemy the Word of God, coupled with His Spirit, cannot defeat. And so, armed only with our sword, we step out to fight our enemies head-on. The struggle is real. It is immediate, and it is in front of us. Our future in God's Kingdom is on the line, and we take up the battle so that we may hold fast to the future He has promised us.

### **What promises can we stand on?**

Matthew 24:13

But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Romans 8:31

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

We fight knowing the end of the story. Two of the many powerful and sure promises in God's Word tell us that if we remain dedicated to God and His Word, we will make it to the end, and we will be saved. There is no doubt in this statement. God's promises are as sure as the one He told Isaiah: "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:11).

So take up your sword. The battle is ours.

## Lesson 8: The Power of Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit

Prayer is an important part of our day-to-day lives. But how often do we think of it in association with the armor of God? Turns out, it's one of the most vital parts!

Artur Aleksandrov, a recent high school graduate in Tallinn, Estonia, tells this story:

“Just recently I was a high school senior, trying my best to balance school, God and various ‘cares of this life.’



When the new year started, I wanted to focus on picking the right national exams to take. When I decided on which ones I prefer, it didn't even come to mind that one of them could fall on the Sabbath. By nature being rather forgetful and slow, I didn't notice the day of the week I was to sit for the first two exams (both were on the Sabbath). I lived on unsuspectingly until, about three weeks before the first exam, one of my teachers casually mentioned something that made my pupils triple in diameter. That's when it hit me!

“...I wrote a letter of request to the center explaining my affiliation with a Sabbath-keeping church and then I started to wait. They tested my faith and patience for a whole month before I got a reply on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. They also requested an affirmation from the Church as proof, which Mr. [Johnnie] Lambert duly composed for me.

“They respected my beliefs, and although my request came way too late, allowed me to sit for the exams on the additional day appointed by them. This was another blessing from God. It was an answer to numerous of my prayers to Him while I was still awaiting the reply from the center. In that period, I was partly preparing to receive a negative answer, which meant failing to graduate and staying for another year in school, and partly really hoping that God would still provide an easier way out. I knew He could—and He did!

“...So, dear brethren, as you can see for yourselves, our gracious and all-powerful Lord responded to our collective prayers with abundant gifts... There is nothing more powerful in this world than the prayers of God's servants—His saints.”

### Praying Always

God's armor is comprehensive. In this series we have spent time examining it, from the ideas behind it, to its purpose and application. It is an absolutely essential part of surviving and winning our battle against Satan. However, right on the heels of his description of the armor of God, Paul adds that we should be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18).

Is there any significance to this admonition appearing immediately after the listing of God's armor? You bet there is!

## **Armor of God: The Power of Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit**

Barnes' Notes comments, "No matter how complete the armour; no matter how skilled we may be in the science of war; no matter how courageous we may be, we may be certain that without prayer we shall be defeated. God alone can give the victory; and when the Christian soldier goes forth armed completely for the spiritual conflict, if he looks to God by prayer, he may be sure of a triumph" (Heritage Edition, Vol. 12, p. 133).

If we equip ourselves with God's armor, we must also be determined to keep a steady line of connection with Him. He is the commander of His spiritual army, and He alone knows how to lead it to victory.

### **How can we be "praying always"?**

Luke 18:1-8

I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

Luke wrote that Jesus gave the above parable to teach that "men always ought to pray and not lose heart," so it serves as a good starting point for understanding what praying always means.

In her quest for justice, the widow never gave up in seeking help from the unjust judge. In our quest for victory, we must never give up in seeking help from our perfect God. The command to pray always is not to say that we must be in a continuous, unceasing dialogue with God every second of every day. Rather, we must develop a connection to God—one that is maintained through regular prayer, Bible study and a godly lifestyle—that allows us to instantly come before our God in prayer in times of distress and need.

### **What is supplication?**

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...

The Greek word translated supplication in both Ephesians 6:18 and Philippians 4:6 is transliterated *deesis* by Strong's Concordance and means a petition or a special request of God.

### **What role does the Spirit play in a Christian's prayers?**

Romans 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit [itself] makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because [it] makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Since we don't always know how to pray as we should, if we have the Spirit in us and are led by that Spirit (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:14), Paul says "the Spirit" will make intercession for us. This means that although we do not always know exactly what we should be praying for, God knows our hearts by living in us (John 17:23).

No matter how clumsily Christians present their requests and no matter how jumbled and confusing they are, God will always know what they are trying to say. Through His Spirit working in us, He has intimate knowledge of our hearts and minds. He understands us and will always work things out for the best in the long run (Romans 8:28).

### **Who or what should we be praying about?**

Matthew 6:9-13

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

In what has become known as the "Lord's prayer," Jesus Christ lays out for us a framework for praying to God. It is not a strict, inflexible format to which we must adhere every time we come before God (Matthew 6:7), but rather an excellent checklist of things we do need to take the time to pray about. We should be praying on a regular basis for, among other things, God's will to be done, our needs to be taken care of, the forgiveness of our sins and deliverance from Satan.

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Luke 21:36

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Along with praying for others, it is vital to also pray for ourselves. Our lives are filled with reminders that we can't make it on our own. It would be inconceivable to refrain from asking God for the help we so desperately require.

Our God stands ready to provide us with the strength, wisdom and courage we need to stand against our enemy, but He wants us first to come before Him and ask for it. Will we?

Matthew 26:39

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

When Jesus prayed fervently before His crucifixion, He knew what He wanted to happen. But He always remembered that His Father was in charge and had the eternal best interests of everyone in mind. It is important for us to pray for God's will to be done too.

Ephesians 6:18-20

...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The ministers of God's Church, on whom falls the bulk of His work, are just as human as the rest of us. They, too, are subject to exhaustion, sickness and heartache. They, too, can—and at times, will—fall short of the high mark God has set for us. Also, they can face difficult trials (Paul spent time in prison for obeying God) and many challenging decisions in doing God's work. Paul was particularly concerned that God would continue to give him the courage, opportunities and clarity to boldly preach God's truth even at the risk of suffering or death.

As this is the case, we should be sure to keep God's servants in our prayers—and not only His ministers, but all His people. We are in this battle together, and prayer is one of the most effective ways we can support each other, care for each other and fulfill the God-inspired command given to us in Philippians 2:4.