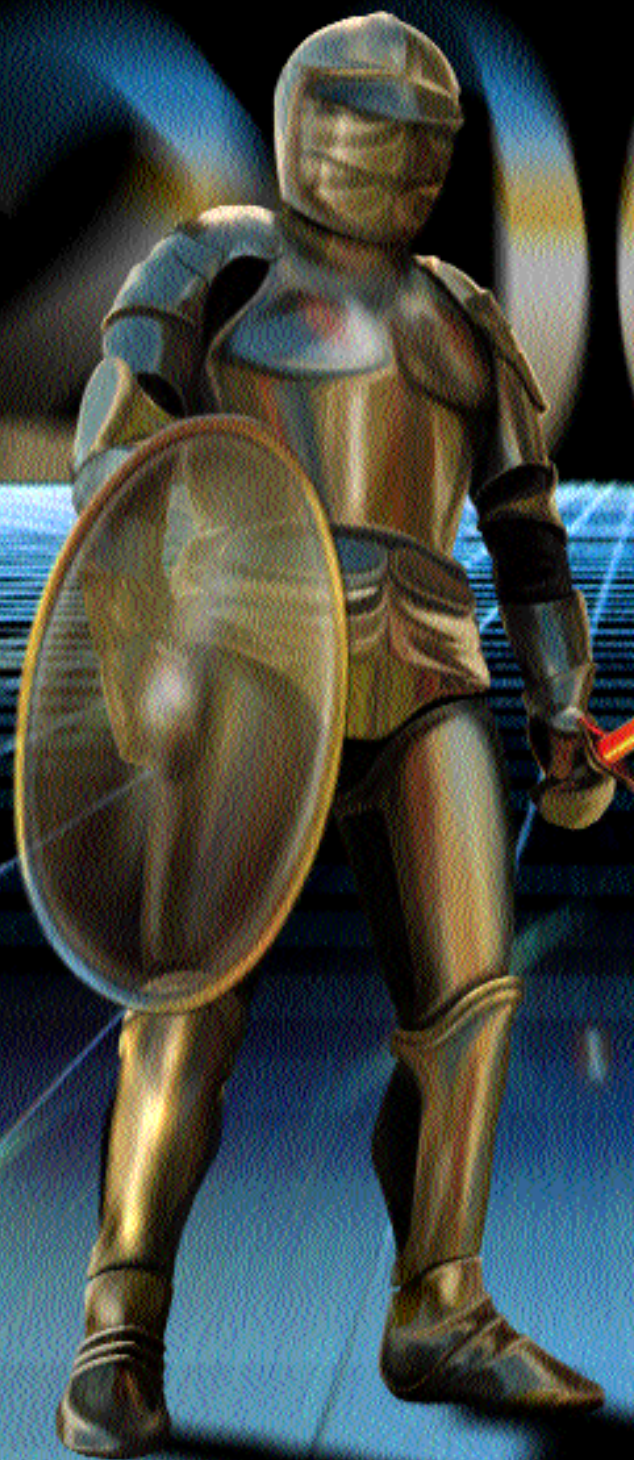


THE NEW WORLD AHEAD

Spring 2000

Facing the New Millennium—



ARMED
with the
ARMOR
of
GOD

Spring 2000



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About the Cover

Facing the New Millennium—Armed with the Armor of God

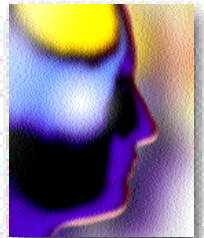
Despite predictions of peace and harmony for the near future, the world's darkest hour is fast approaching. Soon, the forces of evil will hold this world in their grip as never before—and they're out to destroy YOU. This premier issue of *The New World Ahead* explains how you can overcome them (see From the Editors).

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Lead Article 4

The Battle for Your Mind

Though global armed conflict is coming, the most important war is already being waged. We are involved in a spiritual struggle for control of our own minds. It is a fight that we MUST win. But it requires the right armor—as well as preparedness for battle.



Feature Articles

8... **The Helmet of Salvation**
As helmets protect soldiers from fatal blows to the head, keeping the wonderful vision of salvation and all that it entails in the forefront of our minds will protect us from spiritual destruction.

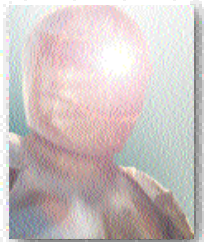
11... **The Breastplate of Righteousness**
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14... **Be Girded with God's Truth!**
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18... **Shod with the Gospel of Peace**
Like trustworthy combat boots, the encouraging Good News of God's Kingdom will carry us forward into battle—ironically, a battle for peace.

22... **A Weapon for All Time**
God's Word is pictured as a mighty sword—the sword of the Spirit. With it we can not only defensively block enemy blows, but we may also offensively strike at the enemy and put him to flight.

28... **Raising the Shield of Faith**
The greatest defense in our spiritual arsenal, faith will see us through to the end of the fight. With absolute trust in Almighty God and His awesome plan, ultimate victory is assured.



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From the Editors

Facing the New Millennium—

Armed with the Armor of God


Though we stand at the dawn of a new millennium, the immediate future does not seem to be getting any brighter. Just recently, we heard the tragic news of yet another school shooting. And all around us, there is far worse news still. Yes, while man looks upward with lofty dreams of a planned international space station as the platform for eventual interplanetary and interstellar colonization, the ground is crumbling beneath his feet—as his society is ripped apart at the seams.

More and more, the “signs of the times” indicate that humanity is fast approaching the end of its rope. Crime, violence and lawlessness are on the increase. Ignorance, poverty and superstition are widespread. Sickness and disease are rampant. The bottom has fallen out of morality, as mankind sinks to new lows. And beyond all this, nature itself appears to be convulsing in a fit of violent earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other disasters. What’s really shocking is to understand that times are, in fact, going to get far worse.

Are you prepared to cope with the traumatic events rapidly coming upon this earth? Will you be able to deal with terrible calamities striking with ever-increasing ferocity? Will you be left standing when the dust settles at the titanic end of this age? There is one who doesn’t want you to. Indeed, this unseen enemy wants you dead and gone—forever. But there’s something you can do about it. You can win the battle against him and against the inimical nature he creates within you that, unchecked, would lead to your ultimate self-destruction.

How? The Apostle Paul tells us, “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 spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places [i.e. in the air]. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day” (Eph. 6:13). Paul then mentions six pieces of this “armor”—elsewhere called the “**armor of light**” (Rom. 13:12)—which we must learn to effectively use: a helmet, a breastplate, a girdle or belt, shoes, a sword and a shield. These represent various facets of our spiritual life—and in this first issue of the *New World Ahead* magazine, these facets receive individual treatment in separate articles.

But it is important to remember that none of these elements stand alone. In the original Greek of the New Testament, Paul used a single term here for “whole armor”—the word *panoplia*. Perhaps we can learn more about it by looking at the English word that derives from it—“panoply.” It is defined as “a full suit of armor... a magnificent or impressive array... a display of ALL appropriate appurtenances [i.e. subordinate parts]” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed.). The sense here is that of being completely outfitted for the battle. If you leave even one part of the armor behind, you’re in big trouble.

Furthermore, in any battle, be it physical or spiritual, it is not enough to simply be armed. Rather, a warrior’s armor must be kept in good working order—and he must be skilled in its use. Part of the skill involves understanding the tactics of the enemy. Thus our lead article: “The Battle for Your Mind.” It lays out the unseen spiritual struggle we are engaged in—and explains some valuable tools God has given us to help us *prepare* for battle. In the end, only those who are spiritually armed and ready will be victorious with Jesus Christ—standing strong forever and ever in the brilliant new world that lies beyond the darkness of this age. 

"For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against... the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world."

**-Ephesians 6:12
Living Bible**

It's very difficult to fight a powerful enemy under any circumstances. But what if you couldn't see him? What if you didn't know where the next blow would come from? During World War II, the Allies faced such an enemy. They called it the "fifth column"—the unseen "enemy within" intent on espionage and sabotage.

Yet the Allies are not the only ones to have ever faced an unseen enemy. For in fact, all of mankind does! As we shall see, there is a very powerful spirit being called Satan, who seeks incessantly to pervert our *thoughts*, thereby gaining control of our minds so as to destroy us. This wholly evil being first sinned against God long ago, before man was ever created. His personal sin eventually resulted in fully one-third of the myriads of angels following him into rebellion (Rev. 12:4; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4). And it's not just angels he can influence negatively. For he is somehow able to inject his own evil thoughts into *our* minds—if we don't block them. In fact, the Bible gives many details concerning Satan's ceaseless struggle to win control of our minds and destroy our chance to receive eternal life.

God's people would do well to learn a valuable lesson from the Trojan War fought between city-states of ancient Greece and the famed city of Troy. The Greeks sent the Trojans a gift of a large, wooden horse, leaving it outside the gates of Troy. The Trojans brought the horse into the city, not realizing there were armed Greek soldiers hidden inside. They later crept out of the horse, opened the gates of the city and let the Greek army inside. Thus were the Trojans defeated. This incident later gave rise to the proverbial expression, "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts!"

Now Satan, of course, is a far more powerful and cunning enemy than were the ancient Greeks. His name is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "adversary" or "enemy." How appropriate, since he constantly invades unsuspecting human minds through his ideological Trojan horses. Satan tries to deceive us into doing *his* bidding, instead of obeying and serving our *Creator*. This powerful seducer "deceives the whole world" into thinking that following his twisted ideas and philosophies is in our best interests (Rev. 12:9; 2 Cor. 12:14).

Satan is the greatest liar who has ever lived. Jesus clearly described his evil character in addressing human beings who were essentially led by him: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own



The Battle for Your MIND

by Raymond F. McNair

resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). The word “devil” is derived from a Greek word meaning “slanderer.” And how true that is. For Satan not only slanders human beings (cf. Rev. 12:10), but he even slanders *God*—having lied to mankind about God’s plan and purpose from the beginning. And his deception has grown ever since.

The devil often uses one group of deceived human beings—those who falsely claim to be God’s ministers—as tools to deceive countless others: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13-15). These ministers do not teach the full Truth of God, but preach “another Jesus... a different spirit [and] a different gospel” (v. 4; cf. Gal. 1:6-7). And Satan orchestrates his great conspiracy with the ultimate goal of *destroying* humanity in mind, body and spirit!

Satan’s Advances

The Holy Scriptures give us a clear picture of the unseen battle that rages every day of our lives. So how can we become more alert to the devil’s tactics? How can we protect ourselves from his deceptive reasoning? The Apostle Paul understood a great deal about Satan’s deception. He warned the saints of God in Rome, Corinth and Thessalonica to be alert—to not be misled by the devil (Rom. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:3).

Paul told the Ephesians that, before their conversion, they were “dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the power of the air*, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Eph. 2:1-3).

What is that “spirit” that now works in those who disobey God? It is *Satan’s* spirit of lust, greed and hatred. Satan’s spirit of envy, pride and vanity. Satan’s spirit of rebellion, disbelief in God and His Word, and the exaltation of the *self*. Satan’s spirit that would keep us from worshiping, serving and faithfully obeying the *Creator God*.

This spirit or attitude permeates the entire world, infecting all areas of life: religion, education, politics, interpersonal relations, entertainment, the arts, sports, etc. We often hear of those who’ve had strong impulses to commit the most heinous acts of rape, molestation or murder. What about those who “hear voices”? The serial “Son of Sam” murders of 1977 have recently returned to the public’s attention because of a 1999 movie, *Summer of*

Sam (which is *not* recommended). After terrorizing the city of New York for months, the killer was finally caught. And in his confession, he admitted that Sam, his neighbor’s dog, ordered him to commit the murders! Remember, Satan is the prince of the “power of the air.”

In order to better understand his influence over mankind, we can perhaps think of Satan using a gigantic “spiritual transmitter” to broadcast foul thoughts and attitudes round the clock. His spiritual “superstation” injects his evil attitudes into the hearts and minds of every human being who does not find a way to *resist* or “tune out” the impulses. But *how* can we resist this powerful broadcast? It’s vital that we find out. For unless we learn to reject Satan’s soul-destroying attitudes, we will never inherit the Kingdom of God.

Let’s look back to Satan’s first advances against the human race to see more of his *modus operandi*. After God had created Adam, He told him he could eat of all the trees in the Garden of Eden except the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Why not? Because if he did, he would “surely die” (Gen. 2:17). God then created Eve to be Adam’s helper (vv. 18-25). Even though Eve knew she was forbidden to eat from this tree, she allowed Satan to play on her natural curiosity—and then succumbed to his deception. “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast.... And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the Garden?”’” (3:2). This was effectively twisting what God said—that they could eat of every tree *except one*. Eve corrected the devil’s misrepresentation, saying, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the tree which is in the *midst* of the garden [that is, the forbidden tree], God has said, ‘You shall not



eat it... lest you die'" (vv. 2-4).

But Satan cleverly countered Eve's statement, saying, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4-5). He thus appealed to Eve's *van-ity*—her desire to become wise. The devil convinced her that God had lied to her—so she took the forbidden fruit. And Adam joined in her sin: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression"—and she induced her husband into sinning with her (1 Tim. 2:14). Eve actually believed Satan's lies, but Adam didn't. Yet, instead of following his conviction by refusing to listen to her, he proved just how weak he was by giving in. Sadly, their sin would bring an avalanche of woe and misery upon themselves and all their descendants (Rom. 5:5:12-21).

Soon afterward, Adam and Eve began to learn what the price of their disobedience would be. In a fit of jealous rage, their firstborn son Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1-15). As these first parents of mankind no doubt looked upon the lifeless form of their dead son, their grief must have been beyond words. They had tuned in to Satan's spiritual wavelength and accepted his lie that their eating of the forbidden tree wouldn't bring suffering and death. But suffering and death had arrived!

Ever since the sin of Adam and Eve, humanity as a whole has been "tuned in" to Satan's wavelength. Just how this great deceiver injects his evil thoughts into our minds is not known. But picture the giant transmitter again. Then think of your mind as a spiritual receiver (like a radio) that can pick up his evil impulses. Remember, however, that whether we accept and act on the evil thoughts and moods he injects into

our minds is up to us! We can either accept his evil impulses or tune him out by resisting and rejecting them.

Today, some of Satan's best tools for disseminating his sinful thoughts and attitudes are the mass media, particularly television! Though TV isn't evil of itself, much of what's broadcast promotes Satan's sinful nature. In America, for example, you could sit in front of a television set from morning to night and see nothing but a constant stream of anti-God ideas and concepts about right and wrong. Yes, besides his *spiritual* broadcast, Satan, as the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), is the unseen director behind much of today's *electronic* broadcasting. So we must all make sure to be careful what we watch, since television is one of Satan's most effective tools!

Winning the Battle

Though the "first man Adam" failed utterly in his struggle with Satan, the "last Adam"—Jesus Christ—would *succeed* in conquering the devil (1 Cor. 15:45; Matt. 4:1-11). How? Before facing big spiritual challenges, Christ first *prepared* Himself by fasting and prayer (cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). "And Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread'" (Matt. 1:1-3). He tried to provoke Jesus by using the word "IF"! Yet the Son of God stood His ground, and quoted the Bible to rebuff him.

When the devil took Jesus up to a high pinnacle of the temple, he challenged Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels

charge concerning you... lest you dash your foot against a stone'" (vv. 5-6). Again, Satan tried to provoke Christ into self-exaltation. Jesus shot back, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'" (v. 7). But the devil didn't give up. Instead, he took Christ "up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me'" (vv. 8-9). Yet how did Christ overcome the tempter? **By refusing to believe his lies, by rightly quoting scripture, and by commanding, "Away with you, Satan!** For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only you shall serve'" (v. 10). Satan knew he had been defeated: "Then the devil left Him" (v. 11).

Christ's example of opposing Satan clearly shows us how we, too, can overcome him. Jesus *fasted* and *prayed* before He met the devil. Then, when this archenemy tried to provoke wrong thoughts in Jesus' mind, He was able to *resist* them. The Apostle James shows us that this is how we can overcome Satan as well: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7-8). Now we can't successfully resist Satan by our own power or human devices. So before we can succeed in resisting the deceiver, we must first yield to God, submitting to Him and His Word, asking Him for the added spiritual strength—the very *spiritual armor*—to enable us to resist and successfully overcome Satan's "fiery darts" (Eph. 4:10-18; Zech. 4:6). In this issue, *The New World Ahead* examines the various pieces of this armor, all of which are vital to winning the war against evil.

One powerful tool Christ used in

continued on page 31

The Armor of God

As we've seen, Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians by exhorting all to put on the whole armor of God. We must never forget that, as Christians, we are quite literally at war. We are the advanced guard of the Kingdom of God, we are behind enemy lines, and we are vastly outnumbered. Therefore, we need to be strong in the might of the Lord, using every defense and every weapon at our disposal. Our enemy, Satan, is the most cunning and vicious of all enemies and we must not underestimate him. To do so would be lethal. We are waging a spiritual war with stakes far higher than those of any previous battle on earth.

Paul describes the armor of God in terms of the battle gear of the Roman legionnaire. The Roman legions were stationed in many places throughout the Roman Empire: west, in Britain; north, along the German frontier; south, in Egypt and along North Africa; and east, in Syria, Palestine and along the borders of the Parthian Empire. With legions so widely quartered, almost every citizen in the empire was familiar with the sight and habits of these Roman soldiers. Their ubiquitous presence would serve as a constant reminder of vital spiritual truths we must never forget.

Paul tells us to stand having the belt of truth buckled about our waist. This belt was a very important part of the Roman gear, for from it hung the Roman short-sword and to it was buckled the breastplate. If this belt was not secure, the sword would fall to the ground and the breastplate would flop about, exposing the chest to an enemy thrust. Just so, Truth must be firmly secured about us—from it hangs the sword of the Spirit, and to it is attached the breastplate of the righteousness we have from God. If we loose the Truth, we drop the sword and lose God's righteousness, exposing us to mortal blows.

The legionnaire's breastplate was made of hammered iron or brass. Just as the breastplate served to protect the vital organs of the warrior, even so the Christian breastplate of righteousness serves to protect our spiritual vitality. While we possess this righteousness, and act according to it, our spiritual life is secure. Frequently the legionnaire's breastplate was decoratively ornamented, enhancing the soldier's appearance. In a similar manner, the righteousness of God should richly ornament our conduct, being evident to anyone who looks upon us.

The Roman legionnaire's feet were shod with tough and durable leather boots. Strapped to the shin and attached to the top front of the boots were thin but rugged metal greaves, which protected the lower legs from assault. Our feet should be shod with the gospel of peace—that is, the reconciliation we have with God through Christ, living the way of peace now through obedience to God's commandments, and the hope of *world* peace that Christ will bring about when He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth. The legionnaire's boot could take a lot of abuse and still not give out—and, in

like manner, the peace we now enjoy with God and the hope of future world peace should enable us to endure much abuse and not give out. Moreover, our spiritual legs should be protected by this peace and hope, ensuring that we will never have our feet "cut out from under us."

Above all, Paul says, take up the shield of faith. Faith—a belief in and trusting reliance upon God—is our greatest defensive implement. Life is full of uncertainties and trials. Faith provides the cover we need. With it we are able to defend ourselves against the trials we will endure, and even the direct assaults of Satan. Moreover, our faith can grow—and in that regard we have a shield that can become larger and larger. At first the shield might be small, providing only a little protection. But with attention and care, we can develop that shield into a full-body cover, something under which we may take refuge when Satan is furiously beating away at us.

The next piece of the armor Paul mentions is the helmet of salvation. The helmet covered the head and provided protection against blows that would disorient the warrior. Just so, our knowledge of salvation—what it actually means, how we achieve it, what Christ has done for us, and what we need to do—can keep us safe from disorienting blows. This knowledge is vital. Without it, one blow could knock us senseless. And a disoriented warrior is easily defeated, no matter how well equipped he may be.

Having all this gear, the final piece is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. That is our only offensive weapon. Knowing what God's Word says allows us to make advances, to conquer, to become victorious over our enemy, Satan, and the work he has done in our human nature. The Word of God teaches us how to war, how to strike, what the weaknesses of the enemy are, and how to hold the ground we take. The sword of the Spirit is an indispensable part of our battle gear, and we must become expert at its use.

Finally, we should notice that none of the armor of God covers our backside. Christianity is an offensive war. We are not to turn tail and run; if we do so, we are completely exposed to our enemy. Instead, God wants us constantly advancing, constantly taking territory, constantly slashing with the sword, fending off blows with the shield, confident in the protection of the righteousness of faith, sure-footed, always able to endure, having all our wits and senses fully engaged in the battle. We have every reason to be so, for we have a Captain who has already conquered, who is Supreme over all, and who is our constant Companion in the fight! Moreover, we are empowered with the greatest power in the universe—the Spirit of God, which enlivens us and fills us with power and a sound mind. With such sure means at our disposal, what boldness we may have!

—David E. Medici

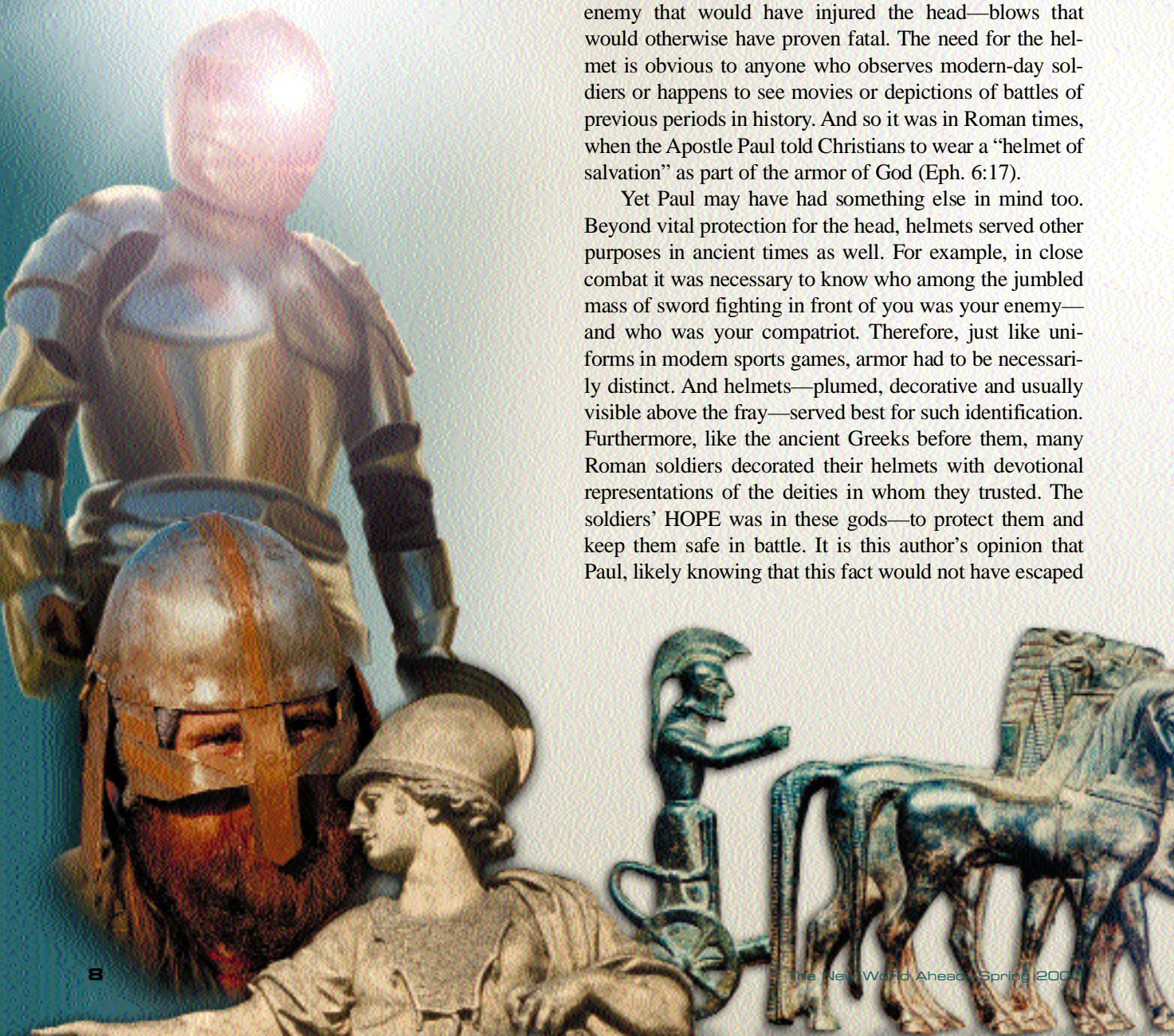
The Helmet of Salvation

by Rex I. Sexton

The earliest soldiers we have written records of are the ancient Sumerians. They wore helmets. Soldiers in the Bible, such as Goliath (1 Sam. 17:5) and King Saul (v. 38), are also described as wearing helmets. In fact, the helmet is universal in the history of arms. In ancient times, individual soldiers carried different weapons to attack the enemy—sword, sling, spear or bow. But they virtually *all* wore helmets.

Down through the centuries, helmets have saved many lives. Usually made of metal or heavy leather covered with metal plates, the helmet served to deflect blows from the enemy that would have injured the head—blows that would otherwise have proven fatal. The need for the helmet is obvious to anyone who observes modern-day soldiers or happens to see movies or depictions of battles of previous periods in history. And so it was in Roman times, when the Apostle Paul told Christians to wear a “helmet of salvation” as part of the armor of God (Eph. 6:17).

Yet Paul may have had something else in mind too. Beyond vital protection for the head, helmets served other purposes in ancient times as well. For example, in close combat it was necessary to know who among the jumbled mass of sword fighting in front of you was your enemy—and who was your compatriot. Therefore, just like uniforms in modern sports games, armor had to be necessarily distinct. And helmets—plumed, decorative and usually visible above the fray—served best for such identification. Furthermore, like the ancient Greeks before them, many Roman soldiers decorated their helmets with devotional representations of the deities in whom they trusted. The soldiers’ HOPE was in these gods—to protect them and keep them safe in battle. It is this author’s opinion that Paul, likely knowing that this fact would not have escaped



the notice of his audience, could have been drawing an object lesson thereby, as will be shown.

Moreover, versed in Scripture, Paul's audience was probably familiar with the reference to God's own "helmet of salvation" mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah (Is. 59:17). In his prophecy, Isaiah writes of the returning Messiah during the Day of the Lord. He also will be wearing, in a figurative sense, a helmet of salvation. But what does this mean for Christians? How should we understand and apply Paul's directive to put on, or cover our head with, the helmet of salvation?

The Greatest Danger

Jesus Christ promised that He would never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). His last promise was that He would be with His followers always, even to the end of this age (Matt. 28:20). In realizing that we are called to "endure all things" (2 Tim. 2:10) and "endure to the end" in order to be saved (cf. Matt. 24:13), we must never forget that the world we now live in is only physical and temporary. In this physical life, everyone will suffer some hardship and problems before they die. Christians also can be subject to persecution and torment by those thinking they are doing God service.

But the great danger for Christians is not that of being hurt physically. The danger we face is that of being separated from God by our own sin. In fact, nothing that *others* do to us can ultimately harm us! Nothing that is done to us can cause us permanent injury! We should never forget this important lesson that Paul learned and recorded for us: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). Only one thing can separate us from God—SIN! God explained this clearly centuries before Jesus Christ was born: "Your *iniquities* have separated you from your God; and your *sins* have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Is. 59:2). And that means that all of humanity has been separated from God—since "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). Moreover, all of humanity has been *condemned*, because "the wages of sin is *death*" (6:23). So in order to be reconciled to God, to avoid the second death and to receive salvation, we must have our sins removed. One of the first steps to receiving salvation is to understand that our sins have built a wall between us and our Creator—leaving us "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) and utterly unable to save ourselves! Paul goes on to explain that "we all

once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath" (v. 3). But from the very beginning, the Creator had a plan to save men from their sins! "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" (John 3:16).

Paul goes to great lengths to explain that salvation is not possible without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ first reconciling us to God. It is only then that we receive the Holy Spirit, through which Christ lives within us—leading us to ultimate salvation (Rom. 5:9-10). Peter described the process we must all go through this way: "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" (Acts 2:38). Yet these first steps of repentance—i.e. actually *turning from sin*—accepting Jesus Christ's payment of the death penalty in our stead and being baptized are just the *beginning* of the journey towards salvation. The *remainder* of the journey involves living a life of obedience to God's commandments and laws and drawing closer to Him through the power of God's Spirit.

It is on this lifelong journey that every Christian must always be wearing the "helmet of salvation." For the journey we are on is one of constant battle. This battle, however, is not visible. It takes place inside our hearts and minds (see Raymond McNair's article, "The Battle for Your Mind," beginning on page 4). Most newly converted Christians start out with the goal of walking the path of yielded obedience to God all the way to the wonderful salvation He has promised. However, it is very sad but somewhere along the way a number of people make a *different choice*—to *neglect* salvation.

Christ foretold that this would happen in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13: "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" (v. 22). Many Christians begin with a high hand and much enthusiasm for following God—only to grow weary or simply die a slow spiritual death through neglect. God's Word warns us not to fall into this terrible predicament: "We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard,



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lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...?**” (Heb. 2:1-3).

In the spiritual battle Christians are engaged in, neglecting what God has called us to—if not stopped in time—will result in a mortal wound to the “head,” i.e. to our mind and spirit. For ultimately forsaking God means eternal death (6:4-8; 10:26-31). So, to protect us from this “head wound,” we need *armor* for the head—we need the helmet of salvation.

Mind on Things Above

In securing our minds against Satan and the cares of this world, Paul tells us what our focus should be: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:1-4)—the actual glory of God!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul more specifically refers to the helmet we must put on when he tells us to put on “**as a helmet the HOPE of salvation.**” Concerning our future glory, the Apostle John says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this HOPE in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). Indeed, that *hope* will inspire us to conform our lives to His!

In order to win the spiritual battle we are in, we must never lose sight of the reason God called us—the hope of salvation! It is the assurance of salvation that gives the follower of Jesus Christ the vision and determination to fight the daily battle against Satan and his devices. We must never lose our focus on salvation if we are to endure to the end and win the race as Paul did.

The men and women who have trodden the path to salvation before us have had to endure great afflictions and hardship in order to obey God. It is amazing to understand that not one of them has yet received the promises that God has in store for them (Heb. 11:39). They all died with one thing—HOPE. They had hope in God’s promises. They had hope in God’s future Kingdom. They had hope in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which makes salvation possible. They had the hope of the first resurrection.

God’s Word gives us many examples of how others have worn their “helmet of salvation.” Abraham, the

“father of the faithful,” kept constantly in his mind a vision of the New Jerusalem. Can you follow this example: “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10 NIV)? This was an example set for us by a man who lived in a tent in the desert! How did he do it? If we focus daily on the incredible future that awaits us, then any problem or trial of this physical life can be put in its proper perspective. Paul reminds us that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

It is so human and normal for us to become bogged down in the trials, problems and difficulties of this physical life. It requires God’s help to keep our minds focused on the *big picture*—the coming Kingdom of God, which will rule over all the earth. When that time comes, all of the previous 6,000 years of mankind living Satan’s way will be all but forgotten. Tears will be wiped away and everyone will live an abundant life according to God’s laws (Is. 11). Just thinking of that wonderful time and how we can share in Christ’s throne to bring it about (Rev. 3:21) is one way to be constantly wearing your “helmet of salvation.”

The night Jesus was betrayed was a time of great trial and confusion for His disciples. Right before they faced these events, He admonished them to focus on the place He would be preparing for them: “Do not be worried and upset.... Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am” (John 14:1-3 Today’s English Version). How much time do we spend studying about and reflecting upon the place that Jesus is preparing for us? This hope and vision stayed with the disciples as they carried out the commission Christ gave to them. Until they died, these men served God and never lost hope—and all but perhaps one suffered violent martyrdom at the hands of evil men! Yet they died with their helmets on!

We must not lose hope either. Christ will “present [us] holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—IF indeed [we] *continue* in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are *not moved away* from the HOPE of the gospel” (Col. 1:22-23). And for that, we need the helmet of salvation. We must always keep the prize of God’s calling (Phil. 3:14)—the Kingdom of God, being part of God’s Family for all eternity—foremost in our mind and thoughts. And then, just as those who

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restrict its deliberations to those contained in God's inspired Word, giving special consideration to those laid down by the example or teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. God has not left us in ignorance, but we need to diligently search out the details of what is involved, "rightly dividing the word of truth" (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15).

As the word itself suggests, righteousness is the essence of being or doing "right" in the eyes of God, of choosing good over evil,

obey God. But Jesus clearly did *not* do away with God's law, as many today maintain. Indeed, in 1 John 5:3 the love of God is defined as the keeping of His commandments. Moreover, Jesus prefaced His comment about exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20) with these words: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one

be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says... 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:21-22). Thus, Christ was showing God's law to be even more binding than had been thought previously. For not only did He forbid overt *actions*, but even the *thoughts* that lead to them.

Another example, which immediately follows in Matthew, is that of the seventh commandment against adultery. Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to *lust* for her has already committed adultery with her **in his heart**" (vv. 27-28). Again, the commandment is broken by *thoughts*—it is violated *in the heart*. And the "heart"—that is, the seat of emotion and feeling—is where we are to KEEP God's law. That is the very purpose of the New Covenant, the terms of which Christians partake of now. In describing it, God says, "For this is the covenant that I will make... I will put My laws in their mind **and write them on their hearts**" (Heb. 8:10; cf. Jer. 31:33).

In this way, "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). A little later, we will look more at the need for God's Spirit. But first, a caution about a ditch many fall into.

Beware Self-Righteousness

As simple as it sounds, the actual achievement of genuine righteousness is beyond man's natural ability. God's Word says, "The carnal [fleshly] mind is enmity against God; for it

Ancient Israel's King David stated it plainly in a psalm to God: "All Your commandments are righteousness" (Ps. 119:172). So, in order to be in right standing with God, we must be keeping His law. Indeed, this is the message of the whole Bible.

which epitomizes the intention of God's great plan of salvation for mankind. Interestingly, in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament as well as the original Greek of the New Testament, the words translated "right" and "righteous," as well as "just" and "justified," have the root meaning of "lined up straight." The sense conveyed here is that of being in perfect alignment with God and His way.

We can see this even more clearly when we look at the Bible's direct definition of righteousness. Ancient Israel's King David stated it plainly in a psalm to God: "**All Your commandments are righteousness**" (Ps. 119:172). So, in order to be in right standing with God, we must be keeping His law. Indeed, this is the message of the whole Bible. Jesus Himself even said, "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*" (Matt. 19:17).

Yet some think that Jesus taught only a message of "love"—abrogating former requirements to

tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these *commandments*, and teaches men so, shall be called least [by those] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever *does and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (vv. 17-19).

Yet some consider ritual observance of the letter of the law to fulfill the requirement of righteousness God has given us. However, in telling us to obey His commandments, God had far more in mind. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spelled out, unequivocally, the "magnification" of the law of God that His ministry was to teach and demonstrate (cf. Is. 42:21). He came to show us the *spirit* of the law—that is, the broad meaning God actually *intended* by giving particular commands.

Notice Christ's explanation of the sixth commandment against murder: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will

is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). Indeed, Scripture tells us that “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God” (3:10-11). In all of human history, only Jesus Christ lived a perfectly righteous life. And this was only possible because He had the Holy Spirit without measure from conception. For as we will see, only with God’s help—indeed, with His own righteousness—can we ever aspire to genuine righteousness in our own lives.

Yet, as has been mentioned, there is a counterfeit of the genuine article that Satan has foisted onto the world. An effort to attain righteousness without total and complete reliance on God’s help, it is known as *self-righteousness*—or, as God’s Word labels such efforts, “*our righteousnesses*.” The Prophet Isaiah writes, “But we are all like an unclean thing, and **all OUR righteousnesses are like filthy rags**” (Is. 64:6). The prophet was describing the people of ancient Israel perfectly. Their main problem was that of trying to attain righteousness by mere human effort. Paul explains, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of *God’s* righteousness, and seeking to establish their *own* righteousness, have not submitted to the *righteousness of God*” (Rom. 10:1-3).

This problem came out worst among the religious leaders of Christ’s day. The hypocrisy that He so vehemently opposed among the Pharisees and religious bigots was the self-righteous keeping of the letter of the law from an inherently judgmental and self-exalting viewpoint (cf. Matt. 23). Moreover, Christ

blasted them for coming up with a strict—even ludicrous—list of regulations for people to obey that ran directly counter to the intent of God’s commandments (cf. 15:1-9). Indeed, this seems to be one of the worst examples of Satan’s counterfeit righteousness there has ever been. And it is absolutely incumbent upon us to make sure we avoid it (v. 14).

As the patriarch Job came to see (Job 42:5-6), the perfection of God’s righteousness is far beyond anything we will ever attain in this flesh (cf. 1 John 1:8, 10). Yet, with God’s help, we can begin the journey toward the perfect righteousness He offers—and begin living by it in increasing degrees even today. But how?

Only from God

As true Christians, we must learn the lesson of looking to God rather than ourselves as the author of our salvation. God is the One who provides us with the power to enable us to meet His requirements

of obedience and tenacity. That power is His Holy Spirit. Remember that love is defined as the keeping of God’s commandments? Well that love is “poured into our hearts BY the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). Indeed, love is the primary aspect of the fruit of God’s Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). And, as Acts 2:38 explains, the Holy Spirit is given upon repentance, i.e. turning back to obeying God (5:32), and the outward symbol of baptism. Thus, righteousness, like the elements it comes through,

is a gift from God Himself.

Another part of the fruit of God’s Spirit is faith (Gal. 5:22-23 KJV)—an essential element in making genuine righteousness possible. Remember that no one is truly righteous on his or her own merits. For, with the exception of Christ, we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23). And no amount of future obedience to God’s law will negate the past *disobedience* of which we have all been guilty. Being declared righteous is only possible through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He paid the penalty for sin in our place so that our slate could be wiped clean, so to speak. Yet we must *accept* this sacrifice, having *faith* in the atonement offered through it, in order for it to actually be applied to us. We are then counted righteous before God. But it does not end there. For we must *continue* in righteousness—which, again, is only possible through faith. As Paul explained, the law is *established* by faith (Rom. 3:31)—that is, through faith it is

As true Christians, we must learn the lesson of looking to God rather than ourselves as the author of our salvation. God is the One who provides us with the power to enable us to meet His requirements of obedience and tenacity.

now actually possible to obey God as an expression of true love. For faith, i.e. the faith we receive from God’s Holy Spirit, empowers us to overcome sin (1 John 5:4). This is the path to genuine righteousness.

As we’ve seen, Paul was inspired, in characterizing the various facets of a Christian’s spiritual armor, to picture righteousness as a “breastplate.” Indeed, God inspired the same imagery in the book of

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BE
GIRDDED
WITH
GOD'S
TRUTH

BY NORBERT LUK

Today, man is a slave of deception and error. But the time will come when the Truth of God will eradicate lies from the world. You, however, don't have to wait that long. You can already have freedom from falsehood and deceit—and begin making a difference today. Here's how!

The hateful, envious religious leaders had Jesus Christ brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, for execution. But Pilate was surprisingly stubborn, quite to the chagrin of Jesus' accusers. So they became more vehement and outspoken. Pilate, somewhat intimidated by them, called Jesus and asked Him whether He was indeed the King of the Jews. This time Christ, who had been virtually silent so far throughout these illegal proceedings, did answer, "You rightly say that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). Pilate's response is telling—and disappointing. "What is truth?" he asked (v. 38). And yet a *number* of people have posed this same question throughout the ages. Most, however, don't seem to know and, unfortunately, many don't seem to even care.

But if *we* want to be Christ's disciples, we *have* to know, and we *have* to care. Since Christ bore witness to the Truth, so must we. And to do so, we must first know what Truth is. Jesus Himself stated that *God's Word* is Truth (17:17). And this Word has come down to us in the form of the Holy Bible. Thus, everything written in Scripture is true. Christ, the *living* Word of God (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13), is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). However, far too often, man has rejected God's Truth and replaced it with his own imaginations (Rom. 1:18-23). Man's concept of "truth" is many times in error and detrimentally opposite to right knowledge. In fact, man's wisdom often *prevents* him from arriving at the correct understanding of God and His Word (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:6-8; 3:18-19).

Yet with God's help, we *can* understand. And indeed, it is our duty to *study* God's Word to come to know the Truth of God. Paul admonished the Evangelist Timothy, "Earnestly study to show yourself approved to God, a workman unashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15 J.P. Green's Literal Translation). Of course, this admonition was not meant for Timothy alone. We must all take it to heart—even passing God's valuable Truth on to others as the need arises. However, the best way to pass this Truth on is not always in what we say.

You see, it is not enough to just "know" the Truth on an intellectual basis. Rather, we must really have a desire to *put into practice* what we learn. Christ tells us in John 7:17, "If anyone

WILLS to DO His will, he shall *know* concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God” and, therefore, whether it is true or not. So in order to gain total freedom from error, we must be willing to—and actually—*live* God’s Truth. Christ told His disciples that they would know the Truth and that the Truth would set them free (John 8:32)—IF they would *abide in*, i.e. continue to live and practice, God’s Word (v. 31).

Children of Light

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that we must be “clothed” or “armed” with God’s Truth. We have to “wear” it constantly. Discussing the armor of God in Ephesians 6:14, Paul writes, “Stand therefore, having *girded your waist* with truth”—that is, as a girdle or belt.

Jesus used a similar metaphor in Luke 12, telling His disciples, “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.... Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler of his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find *so doing* when he comes” (vv. 35-43).

Putting these admonitions together, it should be clear that, for our waist to be girded with Truth, we must continually be *living* the way of Truth (Ps. 119:30). And we thereby set an example for others to perhaps do likewise. Indeed, that’s part of Jesus’ instruction that our lamps be *kept burning*. This includes shining as *lights* to those who are in darkness (Rom. 2:19). Our blameless conduct will identify us as children of God, giving *light* to others in this crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). We are to “walk” as *children of light* (Eph. 5:8) by doing *good works*, serving others (Matt. 5:14-16). To accomplish this, we must put on the “armor of light” (Rom. 13:12), of which Truth is a part. And this means *walking properly*, as in the daylight (v. 13)—according to the *light of God’s Word* (Ps. 119:105).

Our Christian “walk” is all about how we live our lives. The Apostle Peter said, “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, as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy *in all your conduct*.... Since you have purified

your souls in *obeying the truth* through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:13-22).

Peter makes it very clear that being properly *girded* means being *obedient* to the Truth. God’s children do not live a life of practicing lies. The Bible tells us plainly that only those who *do* God’s commandments will enter the New Jerusalem. Those who love and practice lies will not be permitted there (Rev. 22:14-15). We must realize that Truth and lies are incompatible—indeed, they are diametric opposites. That’s why Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, commanded, “Therefore, *putting away lying*, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor’” (4:25).

The incompatibility of Truth and lies is something we should know quite well. So said the Apostle John: “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that *no lie is of the truth*” (1 John 2:21). Why? Because God is a God of Truth, who *cannot* lie (Deut. 32:4; Titus 1:2). If we say anything contrary to the Truth, if we “color” the truth somewhat, if we tell “white” lies, we break God’s Word and are, in fact, engaging in lying.

Of course, more is involved than just *telling* the truth and refraining from *telling* lies, as we’ve seen. It also involves our *conduct*. For example, if we make a promise and then refuse to *do* what we promised, we become, in effect, a liar (cf. Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23; Ps. 15:1-5; 66:13-14; Prov. 20:25; Prov. 25:14; Eccl. 5:2-6).

Remember what Peter said—that we, as “obedient children,” cannot continue fulfilling our former lusts of the flesh. If we do, we do not *practice* the Truth. Rather, we then walk in the way of, and thus live in, error (2 Peter 2:18). *Every* way contrary to *God’s* way of life is in error—a lie. For example, Scripture explains that the prophet Balaam, who was greedy for money, *walked in error* (Jude 11). We must be able to discern between the spirit of Truth and the spirit of error (cf. 1 John 4:6).

When we walk in Truth and righteousness, God can and will use us as His instruments. Many times, just by providing a good example, we can “turn a sinner from the error of his way” and “save a soul from death” (James 5:20). This means, then, that our conduct must be right and true—it cannot consist of actions of which we would be ashamed should they be exposed by the light of day. Notice John 3:21 in this regard: “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” We, having been purified, are to *walk* in the way of Truth.

The verse of Peter cited above revealed that obeying the Truth is directly tied to *loving one another* and doing so “fervently with a pure heart”—i.e. without ulterior motives. Indeed, this is the very evidence that we are of the Truth. Jesus said, “By this *all will know* that you are My disciples, if you have *love* for one another” (John 13:35; cf. 15:12). But how can love provide such evidence—how can it be seen? The Apostle John gives us the answer: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but **in deed and in truth**. And *by this we know* that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him” (1 John 3:18-19).

We don’t love another person “in truth” if we refuse to help him when it is in our power to do so. If, on the other hand, we love someone “in deed,” that’s visible—and it can therefore be *known* that we are of the Truth. This is very practical. The book of James tells us, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (2:15-16). Notice what James is asking: Where is God’s Truth being shown in your life if you refuse to help others in

**When God gives us His Truth,
granting us understanding,
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need? Will your bad example help *others* to learn about God’s Truth? Will they worship God when they see your lack of action speaking louder than your caring words? The answer, of course, is that they won’t.

Armed with the Same Mind

But how can we—weak, insignificant, helpless human beings—be so bold as to even think that we could really stand up for God’s Truth? Well, just looking at what *we* can do, out of our *own* strength, such an endeavor would indeed be presumptuous and quite impossible to accomplish. God, however, does not expect us to do it on our own. In fact, He does not want us to even *try* that, as we would surely fail. James warns us in this regard, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things....

No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God” (3:1-9). So if every person is doomed to fail in word and deed, how can we ever be teachers of God’s Truth? How can we ever be true representatives of God who has willed not to, and therefore *cannot*, lie?

The answer to this dilemma can be found in the remainder of James 3. Though the natural man is incapable of conducting himself completely truthfully, verse 12 points out that this carnal man *can* be overcome, for it emphatically states, “My brethren, these things *ought not* to be so.” In other words, these things *can* be changed. We *can* become truthful, obedient to God’s Word of Truth. We *can* be counted worthy to *teach* God’s Truth to others—by our example as well as our words. *But how?*

Again, not by human strength. There IS a way, however. When Paul stated in Ephesians 6:14 that we needed to be girded with Truth, his words had already revealed *how* this could be accomplished. As has been stated, this Truth is part of the armor of GOD (vv. 11, 13). All the pieces of that armor, including Truth, have to come *from* God. They have to be given to us *by* God. And God has *promised* to do that. However, we must play a part in this too, to be sure. For we have to *accept* and then *utilize* God’s promise. And, when God gives us His Truth, granting us understanding, we have to *retain* this precious knowledge. We have to *treasure* it—so that we won’t forget it, so that it won’t slip away from us (Heb. 2:1). But, let us now ask, how does God *grant* us the understanding of His Truth?

Just prior to His crucifixion, Christ promised His disciples that He would send them another helper, the “**Spirit of truth**,” which would guide them “into all truth” (John 16:13). Man would receive God’s actual power, life and mind. Both the Father and Christ would dwell in man through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6). Indeed, the Holy Spirit—through which we can share God’s own mind—is the source of ALL the armor of God. That’s why Peter says, “ARM yourselves also with the same *mind*” (1 Peter 4:1)—and this certainly includes the belt of God’s Truth.

Furthermore, God’s Truth can only come from Him. And we can only *understand* His Truth if we are *of* Him and *of* the Truth. This requires that God be working through us and in us. And He does so through His Spirit. Moreover, the Holy Spirit does not just *teach* us all the Truth. For true knowledge is of no value if not applied and used. And so we read that God’s Spirit of Truth is also a Spirit of “*power* and of

love and of a sound mind” (1 Tim. 1:7). God’s Holy Spirit empowers us to obey the Truth (cf. 1 Peter 1:22). It empowers us to love our fellow man sincerely, fervently and truthfully—which might include sharing with him our physical possessions or, at times, our spiritual knowledge. And it empowers us to do this with a “sound mind”—that is, with the discernment as to how to do and not to do it, so that we don’t cause unnecessary offense (cf. 3:15).

With God’s powerful Spirit working mightily within and through us, we can indeed be girded with God’s Truth. And we will then grow spiritually. The Christian life is one of forward progression in learning and living the Truth of God. As the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” proclaims, “His truth is marching on.” And for those girded with this Truth, that means continuing to increase in understanding, continuing to become more and more perfect in love and good conduct, and continuing to share with others what we have learned, all until the day of Christ’s coming. And then, something remarkable will occur.

We have read, in Luke 12:35, that we must gird up the loins of our minds while waiting for our Master’s return—which entails living God’s Truth as we understand it. But we will never come to the full and perfect understanding of God’s Truth in this life (1 Cor. 13:9-12). To be sure, God’s Spirit will guide us into more and more Truth, and we are to become more and more perfect, growing in the perfect knowledge of Christ—that is, in Christ’s understanding of God’s Truth. And we must, of course, put into practice what we understand. But perfect understanding will only come when we are changed at the resurrection to meet Christ at His coming. Notice how this is referred to a few verses later in Luke 12.

When Christ comes back and sees us “so doing,” HE will gird Himself and serve us (v. 37). Though this statement is to be understood quite literally, there also seems to be a figurative reference here. Christ, our Master, who is girded with perfect understanding of God’s Truth, will serve us by passing this ultimate understanding on to us. He will give us all the Truth that He Himself possesses. Then, the Spirit will have accomplished what was promised—to guide us indeed into “ALL” the Truth.

What an awesome process is described here. God has prepared for us a future that this world knows virtually nothing about. But you are privileged to know. And of those who know, much is required (v. 48). So let all of us continue, then, to walk more and more boldly in God’s way of life. And always girded with His Truth, may WE go marching on. ■

Helmet— continued from page 10

have gone before us are an example to us, so we can be to others.

Remember the ancient Roman soldiers? They wanted others around them to know what side they were on. And some even publicly displayed homage to the supernatural forces in whom they depended. Now it’s true that Christians are not to be displaying such images, attempting to honor God with pagan customs—but, as I stated earlier, a lesson can be drawn here nevertheless. As publicly devoted as these men were to their gods, we should be even more so to the true God—not with images, but with godly character that is visible to others. While true Christians are not to be offending others or trying to force religion where it is not welcome, we should set an example for others to see in the way we live our lives. Christ commands us, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Part of wearing the helmet of salvation involves living a life that displays the righteous fruit of God’s Spirit. We are also warned not to deny Christ or hide our faith from others: “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (10:32-33).

This is an area in which many of us need to make major improvements. Religion is, for the most part, unpopular in our modern culture. Paul’s message was so unpopular in his day that he was often scorned, stoned and run out of town. Nevertheless, he was not ashamed of the message or calling he’d been given: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). Paul knew that the message he taught was the only hope of salvation. His calling was to wear the helmet of salvation and to arm as many other people with it as he could. He labored and sacrificed everything to accomplish the mission God gave him. No wonder a crown of righteousness awaits Paul at the resurrection (2 Tim. 4:8). That crown will also await you—if you will wear your helmet of salvation as a good soldier of Jesus Christ today. As Paul said: “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2:10).

Are you wearing your helmet of salvation? Good soldiers always do. ■

This world is not a peaceful place! We are bombarded by an endless stream of bad news. Perhaps it's a hot war between developing countries or some protest against civil government. But increasingly, it could just as easily be a mass shooting by a student in school or a disgruntled employee in the workplace. Or maybe it's just another sickening incident of divorce, as another family is shattered into pieces.

Prepared to march—

Shod with the Gospel of Peace

by Larry R. Salyer

Of course, though it seems to be escalating these days, war and conflict is nothing new. The Bible tells us that peace was taken from the earth at the dawn of human history, in the Garden of Eden, when Satan the Devil, the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), corrupted our first parents, Adam and Eve. Shortly thereafter, they were ejected from the Garden—their son Cain, the first child born into the world, becoming a murderer. Indeed, strife and war have been the common fate of most of Adam and Eve’s descendants ever since. The Prophet Isaiah tells us, **“The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace”** (Is. 59:8). And yet, that is the path the world has taken—and which even God’s people sometimes fall into.

Assaulted by a barrage of strife and contention, not only among those around us, but frequently in our own personal lives, how many of us would consider protecting ourselves with shoes? Yet we find special shoes recommended as an integral part of what the Apostle Paul calls



the “whole armor of God”—just as the Roman legionnaire wore sturdy leather sandals with ankle support and hobnailed soles half an inch thick. We could properly refer to them as combat boots. Any experi-

can permit the soldier to lay down his weapons and cease his constant, nerve-racking vigilance. Only true peace can calm his personal fears and fulfill the larger purpose for which he fights. But in the battle

nations” (Matt. 28:19) are carrying the same Good News, following in His footsteps. Their feet are *also* beautiful to those who accept their message of the peace that will come through Jesus Christ.

“The soldier—that is, the great soldier—of today is not a romantic animal, dashing at forlorn hopes, animated by frantic sentiment... but a quiet, grave man, busied in charts, exact in sums, master of the art of tactics, occupied in trivial detail; thinking, as the Duke of Wellington was said to do, MOST of the shoes of his soldiers.”

—Walter Bagehot, British Journalist, 1858

enced soldier, even today, will tell you that his combat boots are a critical factor in waging successful battle against the enemy. Tough and durable, they protect the feet on hazardous terrain, they support the rest of the body, and they are crucial to effectively marching toward the goal. In short, a soldier’s shoes are the foundation on which he stands, and the vehicle that carries his weapons into battle.

With that in mind, notice how Paul describes the battle shoes of a Christian: “... having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). This unusual metaphor demands closer examination. Why are the feet associated with the Gospel? And why is peace the focus of the Gospel in this context of warfare? The answers lie in understanding some key truths about God’s marvelous plan for the future of mankind.

Beautiful Feet?

The word “Gospel” is the equivalent of “Good News.” What could be better news to those engaged in battle than an announcement of peace? For no matter how effective the armor, war is miserable. Only the cessation of warfare and the confidence that it will not be resumed

with Satan, true peace can come only when the foe is vanquished and his power taken away. And the Gospel of peace, as the Bible reveals, includes the good news that Satan’s power to stir up the forces of evil and wage continual war against mankind is going to be destroyed through Jesus Christ. Soon, He will set up the Government of God on this earth and bring peace at last.

The Prophet Isaiah describes both the messenger and the message contained in this Gospel: “**How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’**” (Is. 52:7). Beautiful feet? Yes—because they are the vehicle by which this wonderful message is delivered. And “mountains” in biblical prophecy are symbolic for kingdoms or nations. So the picture is of a messenger carrying a wonderful message of peace, salvation and divine rule to the nations. Isaiah’s description applies first and foremost to Jesus Christ Himself, who, at the beginning of His ministry, “came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14). But in truth, *all* who obey Christ’s instruction to “go... and make disciples of all the

And what a glorious message it is. Isaiah prophesied the birth of Jesus and the eventual effect of His righteous rule after His future return and triumph over Satan: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and [at His return] 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” (Is. 9:6-7).

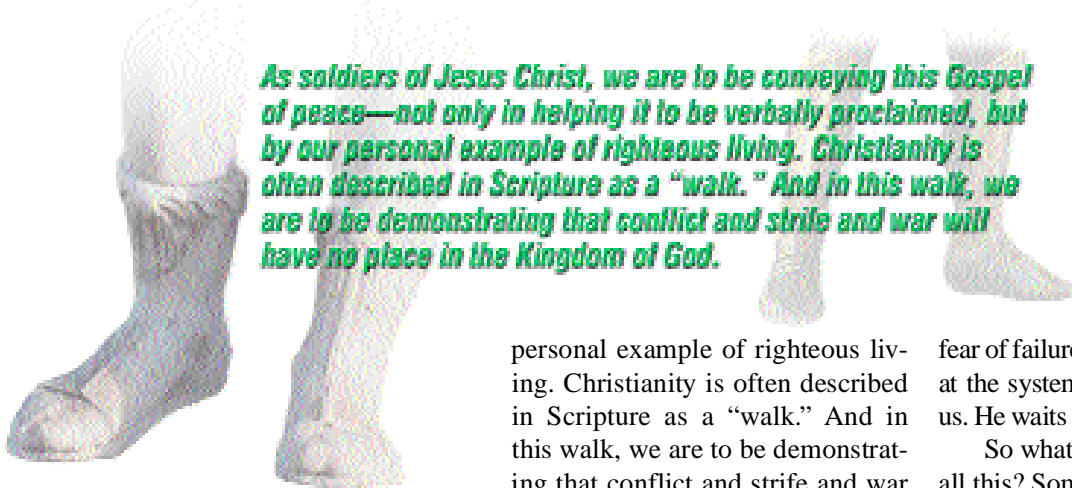
The Psalms declare God’s coming intervention to bring man the peace and stability that have always escaped him: “The LORD sits as King forever. The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace” (29:10-11).

And once again Isaiah tells us, “Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Is. 32:16-18).

© ComIllustration by Christy Hays

Peace flows from *righteousness*. And what *is* righteousness? Living by God's commandments (Ps. 119:172). As we've seen, Isaiah also explained that there is a WAY to peace, which humanity does not know. Obviously, then, that way is in obeying God's laws. And if we choose to live in *disobedience*, the same prophet has another message for us: "'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Is. 57:21).

How, then, will the world finally learn the way of peace? By being taught to live by the commandments of God. As Isaiah assures us and the Prophet Micah echoes: "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"



As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we are to be conveying this Gospel of peace—not only in helping it to be verbally proclaimed, but by our personal example of righteous living. Christianity is often described in Scripture as a “walk.” And in this walk, we are to be demonstrating that conflict and strife and war will have no place in the Kingdom of God.

(Is. 2:3; cf. Micah 4:2). And this understanding will be universal: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Is. 11:9).

Isaiah and Micah both tell us of that great day: "He [Christ] shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; 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" (Is. 2:4; Micah 4:3). As Revelation 19

makes clear, Jesus will initially have to fight against His enemies when He returns to earth—but only to *establish peace* and offer all of mankind *permanent* peace.

In all of this, perhaps we can better understand why the feet of those bringing us this wonderful message are so precious and, as God's Word says, beautiful. But it's not only about the future. Nor is it just about what the messengers say.

Pursue Peace

As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we are to be conveying this Gospel of peace—not only in helping it to be verbally proclaimed, but by our

personal example of righteous living. Christianity is often described in Scripture as a "walk." And in this walk, we are to be demonstrating that conflict and strife and war will have no place in the Kingdom of God. We are called to counter the prevailing human wisdom that regards turning the other cheek as weak and foolish. And this demonstration also shows that a degree of peace is possible even now—inner peace and peace with others—through obedience to God's commandments.

Yet living at peace with our neighbor will require special effort. Jesus pointed out that the world is so steeped in the ways of Satan the Devil that, today, His message of peace often actually provokes *con-*
flict among family and friends (Matt.

10:34-35). For upon conversion, Christians become *opponents* of Satan and his way of life. And since virtually all people are victims of his deception and do not grasp the spiritual principles by which Christians strive to live, the result is conflicting values (cf. John 15:19). Even the natural affection of family is usually not enough to prevent controversy between the converted and the *unconverted*. Thus, Christians are not often called into an environment of peace at this time.

Furthermore, our enemy, the devil, is anxious to see us give in to the culture about us and engage in strife, hatred and murder. Thus, his world bombards us with constant

pressures and opportunities to become like he is. Behind the scenes, he stirs up strife and conflict. He provokes men to wrath. He takes away justice and sows discouragement and

fear of failure. He goads us to lash out at the system and those who trouble us. He waits for us to fall into his trap.

So what do we do in the face of all this? Sometimes the best defense is a good offense. In this case, we strap on our combat boots and march forward—combat here ironically meaning to extend *peace* to others, spiritually fighting against the way of Satan. Indeed, Christians are charged with taking the initiative in establishing peace as a fundamental goal of human relations: "**Pursue peace with all people**, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Again, not all men will respond in kind to our overtures of peace—but it is our duty to give them the opportunity to do so. Paul tells us, "If it is possible, *as much as depends on you*, live

peaceably with all men.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:18, 21).

Even if we are unsuccessful in provoking others to pursue peace, we will have fulfilled our calling to be peacemakers. And there are tremendous blessings for such efforts, including a place in the Family of God. Christ taught His disciples the importance of a peaceable attitude and way of life, saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).

So where's the best place to start? With *family*—not just our physical family, but also our spiritual family, the Church of God. Christ provided a formula for preserving peace within His Church. The very first step demands that through the Holy Spirit we summon the courage to communicate honestly and frankly with our spiritual brethren when actual conflict arises. Christ said, "Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (18:15). This is the beginning of a genuine "peace process." Can you imagine what would happen in the world if everyone obeyed the command to go to his fellow man and work out conflict instead of spreading accusations and gossip?

Yet all too often, we fail to live up to our Christian responsibility in this area. Instead, misguided and offended individuals may seek solace from others—which only results in recounting someone's alleged sins, thereby sowing discord and widening the area of conflict. Negligence in following Christ's clear instruction on conflict resolution may indeed be one of the greatest weaknesses among God's people. Yet how can we effectively carry the Gospel of peace to others if we are unwilling or afraid to practice it ourselves?

Onward, Christian Soldiers!

Knowing all this in advance, Jesus gave His disciples the weapons for resisting the devil. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Christ is putting His followers on notice that life in Satan's world will not be easy. There will be plenty of contention and argument. There will be persecution. There will be temptations to join in the fray. But we must look beyond the limitations of our personal strengths and trust in Christ to give us peace. And we can look to the light at the end of the tunnel, knowing that Christ is going to return in power and glory to bring peace for all.


Having our feet shod with the preparation of this Gospel of peace is a powerful weapon against discouragement and fear. Our confidence is in the coming King of Peace. We are empowered to resist Satan, who would like to subvert us into defending ourselves by carnal means. This life may be a constant spiritual battle, but we have the peace of knowing that Christ will eventually save us from destruction.

Furthermore, our commitment to peace is a fruit of the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22-23). Christ within us will give us peace and lead us to be *peaceful*—if we are yielded to Him. Notice the Apostle Paul's comforting words to Christians: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God; and **the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus**" (Phil. 4:6-7). Did you catch that? It says the peace of God will

GUARD your hearts and minds! So peace really is an effective component of our spiritual *armor*. Focusing our attention and our message on the peace that follows Christ's victory can give us the vision to press on toward the goal of God's Kingdom.

Yes, prophets of old foretold the coming of this Kingdom to usher in a time of unprecedented peace and quiet assurance. Jesus taught the same message of peace and sent his disciples out to declare peace to others. Christ pronounced a blessing on the peacemakers, and both Jesus and His apostles exhorted the Church to proclaim peace and pursue it in their personal lives. When Christ returns, He will bind Satan and administer righteous judgment over the whole planet. And incredibly, this strife-torn world will finally know peace.

Echoing the words of Isaiah, the book of Nahum exclaims, "Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!" (1:15). The "him" here, we should now recognize, represents the true servants of God—their feet "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." May this be all of *us*—taking the fight to the enemy, planting our spiritual boots firmly on new territory, and yet always advancing.

Thankfully, as Christian soldiers, we have the priceless privilege of knowing the outcome of the war we are in. And we can focus our attention on the time when the victory will be ours and when lasting peace will be a visible reality. We can carry on the fight in the confidence that we are fully protected by the whole armor of God. And that we are marching forward with the hope of the world, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—the Gospel of everlasting peace. 



The Sword of the Spirit

A Weapon for All Time

by Bill Swanson

For the vast majority of human history, the sword has been the weapon of choice. It is only in the last few centuries that guns, newly invented, have taken over that position. But swords still capture our imagination, whether they be King Arthur's Excalibur or Luke Skywalker's lightsaber—being, in the words of Star Wars character Obi-Wan Kenobi, “not as clumsy or random as a blaster—an elegant weapon for a more ‘civilized’ age.” Of course, that hacking into people could truly be described as “elegant” is arguable. Still, there is a certain mystique about swords and sword combat. Yet for all practical purposes, it must be admitted that swords in the familiar sense are obsolete in modern warfare. Nevertheless, there *is* a sword that can provide greater protection than any modern weapon—and that protection is sorely needed right now, even at the turn of the millennium.

Today, we are in constant jeopardy against thieves, sexual deviants and other societal predators. Yes, we have police departments and other security services that can serve as armor against these criminals. Some homes are equipped with security alarms where just the flip of a switch can bring a police or security officer within minutes. Indeed, there are *many* material devices that people use for protection. While some turn to mace or even handguns, most of us rely on securely locked doors and perhaps electronic detectors or a Club for the car. There's even a hidden homing device that can be installed in your car, which, in the event it is stolen, will enable it to be

tracked by 11 satellites in the sky.

We can and should take *certain* physical precautions to protect ourselves as well as those we love. But there is one thing from which no physical device will protect us—the chief of all evils, Satan the Devil, and his efforts to destroy our minds. “Because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Even in our so-called Christian society, this evil is always at work—and we need to be aware of it and know what is needed to defend ourselves. The Apostle Paul instructs us, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles [Greek *methodia* or “methods”] of the devil.... For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the ruler of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Eph. 6:11-12).

These invisible spiritual forces are what we are all up against—and they are immune to physical armament. But we do have access to armor that can protect us—the armor of GOD, as the rest of this magazine makes clear. And a very important part of that armor is the “sword of the Spirit,” the *Word of God* (v. 17)—a timeless weapon as effective today as it ever was. Yet sadly, many don’t think so these days—mainly because they have not yet *proven* it. For you see, if God’s Word is properly used, and IF we have proven it, the mightiest evils will fall before it—and ultimate triumph will be ours.

We Must Prove It!

Can just anyone use God’s armor? Do you know how? In the centuries when swordplay was the order of the day, most people knew not to go into battle if they were not skilled swordsmen. And one thing all

skilled swordsmen knew was not to go into battle with a weapon with which they were unfamiliar. Well, many have tried to use the *spiritual* sword, the Word of God, asserting that it did not answer their problems nor protect them—leaving them, of course, very discouraged. Why? **They were unfamiliar with it and hadn’t really proven it!** Scripture itself tells us that we need to *study* to show ourselves approved and to be able to lay God’s Truth out in a straight line—that is, to properly use it (2 Tim. 2:15).

Notice the example of David. He was given the armor of Saul to protect him from the enemy, the Philistine giant Goliath. David, however, knew he couldn’t use this armor because he had not used it before and *had not proven that it would work* (1 Sam. 17:39). But he had proven what he already had—and *what he had was the armor of God!* Yes, he had a staff and a sling—and put five stones for slinging in his shepherd’s bag. But notice that even with these physical items, his real armor was his trust in God! He told Goliath, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand” (vv. 45-46). David could trust God to deliver him as he had already experienced and proven Him! Before going out, he had said, “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine!” (v. 37). And we all know the miraculous outcome.

Another example is given to us in the book of Acts—this time a negative example. Paul performed miracles, even the casting out of demons. Yet others, who had not proven the armor of God, tried to do the same

(19:12-14). The result? “The evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?’ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding” (vv. 15-16). So again, we must *prove* the armor God gives—including His Word—and we must be sure to use it properly.

Real Protection

The Word of God is the surest, most powerful weapon in the universe. Indeed, by it God *created* the universe (Ps. 33:6). Furthermore, Jesus Himself is referred to as the Word of God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-2, 14). And at the end of the Bible, John writes of Christ’s return, “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God” (Rev. 19:11-13). Jesus, as the God who communicated with the Israelites in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4), was the One who directly inspired the Holy Bible on the Father’s behalf.

Jesus set a powerful example for us when He used the written Word of God (i.e. of His Father and Himself) to protect Himself from Satan and his tactics. The book of Matthew shows that Satan actually

quoted Scripture, although twisting it to his own purposes: “Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone”’” (4:5-6).

Jesus’ defense was to quote God’s Word right back, using it correctly: “*It is written again*, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God’” (v. 7). Christ had a full range of scriptural knowledge. Too many have used only *parts* of the Word of God as their weapon and to no avail. While we may only need to quote certain verses, to do that properly requires knowing the whole Bible. Jesus said we must use *all* of the Word of God—*live by every word* (v. 4). Peter warns that many take the words of God and twist them to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16). We must not be among them. Rather, we must be those who use God’s Word properly. Then, it can help us in so many situations.

Facing financial disaster? Perhaps you’re not using what God’s Word says about a principle of financial blessing: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field” (Mal. 3:10-11). Knowing God’s Word and what it says about tithing can protect us from Satan and keep us from financial ruin. One individual saw this happen when he started to tithe and observe the other laws that God has given to us. His

wheat crop was in danger of being wiped out by a storm. He prayed about it—another injunction contained in God’s Word—and then watched through his window as the torrential rain came up to his fence line and stopped, the storm passing over without hurting his crop at all. God fulfilled the promise contained in His Word!

Another example is that of a young teenager who was threatened by “gang members” in his school. They told him they would cut his throat if he came back to school the next Monday. But this young man went home and took out the spiritual sword of God’s Word. In it he read of special miracle-working power being given through *prayer and fasting*. For in Matthew 17, after the disciples had unsuccessfully tried to cast out a demon, Jesus said to them, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (vv. 20-21). So this young man USED God’s sword—he prayed and fasted. Returning to school the next Monday, he found that the principal had expelled all these gang members and he had no more trouble with them. Again, the Word of God is sure—it 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” (Heb. 4:12).

Cutting Through the Deception

Perhaps the most important area the sword of the Spirit protects us from is *being deceived in our minds*. What most don’t realize is that Satan the Devil “deceives the whole

world” (Rev. 12:9). In the guise of light and truth, he is now deceiving the minds of many people on this earth and even some among the Church of God. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Even Christians are warned to be aware of Satan’s tactics, such as subtlety. “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (v. 3). To help us defend ourselves, Peter gave us this admonition: “I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2 Peter 3:1-2)—that is, the Word of God! We need to continue to *fill our minds with the Word of God*, our spiritual weapon to protect our minds from those who are trying to lead many astray.

Sadly, many today are being turned off from God and Christianity as a result of church splits and schisms. But God’s Word can keep us focused. Paul wrote to the Evangelist Timothy, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation**

"Word" in Ephesians 6



through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, *thoroughly equipped* for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:12-17).

We must all do as Joshua was instructed to do by the preincarnate Word of God, the One who became Jesus Christ. Joshua learned that if he followed this directive it would always *protect him and bring him lasting success and prosperity*. "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you [the only written Word of God at that time]; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7-9).

If we trust in the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, using it properly as Jesus did, we will be able to conquer the wiles of Satan. The Apostle John wrote, "I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and **the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one**" (1 John 2:14). Yes, we have the most powerful weapon in the universe at our disposal—as effective now as it ever was. Let us always trust in it and skillfully *utilize* it to vanquish the enemy from our lives. "For," as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, "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." ■

In describing the armor of God in Ephesians 6, why does the Apostle Paul tell us we need a belt of Truth *as well as* the "sword of the Spirit," which, he says, is the "word of God"? After all, Jesus said that God's Word is Truth (John 17:17). So doesn't being girded with Truth entail being girded with God's Word? Indeed. Of course, the "sword" would metaphorically *hang* on this belt and be drawn *from* it—but why do we see it pictured as a separate implement?

The term "word" is usually translated from the Greek *logos* and, in the phrase "word of God," often denotes "the sum of God's utterances, e.g., Mark 7:13; John 10:35; Rev. 1:2, 9" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, p. 683)—that is, all Scripture, the Holy Bible. And that can be related to the *belt* we are to be girded with—the belt of Truth.

So what of the *sword*, the "word" of God? Though the whole "word [*logos*]" of God is... sharper than any two-edged sword" in Hebrews 4:12, the picture Paul paints in Ephesians 6:17 is more detailed. As the *King James Study Bible's* note on this verse states: "The Greek term rendered 'word' is not *logos*, referring to the whole Word of God, but *rhema*, referring to certain portions or selected verses of Scripture." *Vine's Expository Dictionary* supports this understanding: "The significance of *rhema* (as distinct from *logos*) is exemplified in the injunction to take 'the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God,' Eph. 6:17; here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture" (p. 683).

The picture, then, is this. From the belt of Truth—the totality of God's revelation—we may draw forth, as a sword, individual scriptures or passages to use in particular circumstances. With such powerful statements from God's Word, we may "parry" or "block" whatever blows are being dealt against us—and we may offensively "thrust" at the enemy. This is the very example Jesus Christ set for us in Matthew 4 as he countered Satan's temptations by quoting scriptures. Of course, no verse exists in isolation. Particular scriptures should be understood in light of the *whole* of biblical revelation.

The need for us, then, is clear. It is not essential that we memorize the *numbering* of biblical verses—though that often helps—but it is critical that we memorize the *ideas* contained within them. And the more we study God's *entire* Word, meditating on key verses, the better we will be at drawing forth scriptures to use in given circumstances. Moreover, if we are prayerfully yielded to God, His Holy Spirit will help us in this to a much greater degree (cf. John 14:26).

And there is, perhaps, another lesson here. It is not enough to merely *have* God's Truth—to be girded with it. We must also *apply* it when the need arises, as explained in Norbert Link's article, "Be Girded with God's Truth!," beginning on page 14. Therefore, let us always be ready to *draw forth* the ideas contained in God's Word and then *use* them—to overcome and finally *win* the great war we are engaged in.

—Thomas E. Robinson

Raising the Shield of Faith

by Bees Ellis

In describing the spiritual armor of God, the Apostle Paul tells Christians to, “ABOVE ALL,” take up “the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph. 6:16). Yes, Satan assails us with “burning arrows”—temptations and trials intended by him to pierce and burn away the godly character being formed within us. But through the protection of God’s armor, we can fend off the devil’s attacks. And the most powerful defense among the whole of God’s armor is faith—the *shield* of faith. In writing this, Paul, no doubt, had in mind the large wooden shield of the Roman legionnaire. Covered with leather and bound with iron, it screened most of the soldier’s body. Not only did it protect him in direct sword combat, but it also served as a cover against enemy arrows. Indeed, it is recorded that, following one battle, though around 200 arrows were found stuck in the shield of a particular Roman military commander, he himself walked away unharmed. And so it can be with us—so it *must* be.

Not only is faith precious (1 Peter 2:7)—it is absolutely essential to our spiritual existence. The book of Hebrews tells us that “he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (11:6). Yes, how can we even begin to please God if we doubt His very existence? Praying without faith, the Bible makes clear, is a waste of time (Matt. 21:27; James 1:6). But faith involves more than just a belief in God’s existence—for even demons have that (2:19). And it’s more than knowing God wants to reward us.

So just what exactly IS faith? How do we develop it? And what impact will it have on our lives?

Belief in the Invisible

A paraphrase of Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead” (Living Bible). This begins a chapter that some have dubbed the “Faith Chapter” or the “Hall of Faith”—as

it lists many of the great characters of the Old Testament who had this important quality. Among these is one whom Paul calls the “father” of the faithful—the patriarch Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:11, 16). An investigation into his life will reveal how he came to be a vibrant example of faith.

God called Abraham, known then as Abram, out of his homeland to dwell in an unfamiliar country far away (Gen. 12:1-3). How did he respond to this drastic request? “So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him.... Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan” (vv. 4-5). No arguing, no discussion—Abram simply acted right away.

The Lord had promised Abram immense blessings: he would be the father of a great nation. This was later expanded upon in Canaan. God “brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.... So shall your descendants be.’ And [Abram] believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness” (15:5-6 NRSV).

But it should be noted that *conditions* were attached to this promise: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; *walk before Me and be blameless*. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly’” (17:1-2). Again, God imposed conditions. The Almighty required Abram’s obedience and Abram, thereafter called Abraham, obeyed. He performed as he was told. Yet God was going to test him in order to discover what was in his heart.

God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah a son through whom the family would be multiplied as the stars of heaven. They both believed in God’s promise in spite of their old age. As Paul would later write: “And not being weak in faith, [Abraham] did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about 100 years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in



faith, giving glory to God, and **being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.** And *therefore* ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (Rom. 4:19-22). In all this, we can see that this man *demonstrated* his faith in God and in His promises—through firm conviction and resultant obedience. This is the key.

Now we come to a very pivotal moment in Abraham’s life. God had seen his faith, but He wanted to measure its depth. A test would reveal it. So He gave Abraham an incredible order—to sacrifice his son, the beloved son he had longed for. Notice in Genesis 22: “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (vv. 1-2).

What God was asking was excruciatingly difficult—much more so than moving to another country. Yet how did the father of the faithful react to this new request? “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (v. 3).

Again, Abraham did not hesitate. He didn’t try to reason within himself, in desperation, to find a way out of accomplishing this terrible request. He did not allow carnal thoughts, negative thoughts, rebellious thoughts to enter his mind. Such thoughts would, no doubt, have prevented him from carrying out God’s orders.

No, Abraham did not argue. He didn’t even ask why! He didn’t remind God that this was the son he’d been promised, the son for whom he’d waited for so many years, the son through whom was supposed to descend a promised great nation.

Instead, Abraham simply obeyed. He gathered all that was necessary to accomplish the sacrifice, and for three days they journeyed to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his beloved son. And when they got there? “Abraham

stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (v. 10). In his heart, in his mind, Abraham had already willingly sacrificed Isaac (cf. Heb. 11:12). Yet at the last second, God stopped Abraham from actually going through with it, saying, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:11-12).

But until that moment, Abraham didn’t know this would happen. So where did he find the necessary resources to be so obedient? Hebrews 11 explains: “By *faith* Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, ‘It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.’ He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Heb. 11:17-19 NRSV).

Against fear, doubt, worry and human reasoning, Abraham raised the shield of faith. He had total confidence in God. The Almighty had promised to multiply

his descendants through Isaac—and Abraham knew that God would never fail to fulfill what He had promised. Abraham also knew that if Isaac died, the very Creator of life could, and *would*, resurrect him in order to fulfill His promise. So, knife in hand and arm raised, Abraham had been ready to sacrifice his beloved son.

God knew then that He could trust Abraham. He knew that Abraham was ready to do anything He would ask of him. Abraham had passed his ultimate test of faith and proved to God that he was indeed faithful. And from that time on, God's promise to him became unconditional. Notice: "Because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore.... In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:15-18).

Abraham is an example for us today. The Lord's promises were real to him. Before Isaac was even conceived, this intangible son was real to him. Moreover, the *descendants* God had promised him *through* this son were a reality too—so much so that he did not hesitate to sacrifice his son. And *that* is genuine faith.

Source of Faith

How do we acquire faith? It's not something we can buy or something that can be implanted into our minds through hypnotism. Rather, faith is something that is developed. So where do we start?

Faith, remember, is the assurance that God will accomplish what He has promised. So we must start by knowing what God promises. And where do we find that? In His Word, the Holy Bible. Paul says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The first step, therefore, is reading and studying the Word of God—including listening to those who expound the Word of God to us (cf. Acts 8:31). The Bible is our production tool. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). This is one of the reasons so many lack faith in our day and age. People are not reading their Bible anymore, let alone studying it. They don't know what God has promised, so how can they believe in His promises? The more we know God's Word, the deeper we can be grounded in faith as we are commanded to be (Col. 1:23).

But the faith we acquire is not something we generate ourselves. Rather, as we study the Bible, God *gives* us faith: "God has *dealt* to each one a measure of faith" (Rom 12:3). It is a *gift* from God (Eph. 2:8). How does God give us faith? Through His Holy Spirit—faith being part of the "fruit" it grows within us (Gal. 5:22-23 KJV). And how does one have the Holy Spirit? "To these facts we bear witness, with the holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32 Moffatt Translation). Here again, we can see how the Bible is our tool for acquiring faith. In order to obey God, we must know what He requires of us.



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The Bible reveals to us God's will—what He expects us to do. If we do what God expects of us, making a covenant with Him to change in order to follow the way of life prescribed in His Word, we can be baptized and receive His Spirit, through which He will grant us faith (cf. Acts 2:38; Gal. 2:20). Thus, the faith we acquire by the study of God's Word is accompanied by repentance and followed by conversion (Acts 11:21).

As mentioned, God gives us a measure of faith. But our faith must then grow (2 Thess. 1:3). This requires that we pray for more (Luke 17:5), nourishing and developing the faith He gives so that it can become perfect and complete. Moreover, our faith must be *exercised* in order to grow, just as Abraham's was. His faith was brought to completion by his obedience. The book of James states, "Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works" (2:21-22 NRSV). Not only is obedience evidence of our faith, but faithful obedience engenders more of the same. Without this continued exercise, our faith dies (v. 17). Faith requires action in order to survive and grow.

Of course, this obedience itself is only possible through God—both the Father and Jesus Christ. Let us never err in thinking that faith is only about God's *promises*. The primary object of our faith must be God: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me," Christ said (John 14:1 NRSV). The object of our faith is God the Father and Jesus Christ. We must believe that God exists and that He keeps His promises—but also that He has a plan for humanity and that this plan includes Christ's shed blood for the remission of our sins and His living in us now to perfect us in His way of life.

Jesus Christ gave us the perfect example of living faith. Too few people realize that Christ's actions, His obedience to His Father's will, were not the result of a supernatural power that only He possessed. Divested of His divine powers and thus a full human being (cf. Phil. 2:7; Heb. 4:15), Jesus said that *by Himself He could do nothing* (John 5:30). Meditate on that for a moment. His faith was not of Himself. It was of His Father. Christ said, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" (14:10). It was because the Father lived in Jesus by the Holy Spirit that Jesus had such dynamic, living faith. Jesus had total faith in His Father and in the power of His Spirit. How much more should *we* not trust *ourselves* and rely only on God?

Today, we must have the same faith Christ did—that is, the very faith of Jesus Christ: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the

commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12 NRSV). Those who are begotten of God have the faith of Jesus—as He now lives in us (Gal. 2:20 KJV). Christ has shown us the way and given us the supreme example of living faith. And as Abraham's faith was evidenced by his obedience to God, Jesus' faith was evidenced by the *perfect* example of obedience.

Life of Overcoming

Through faith it is actually possible to obey God—even in the face of forces that seek to destroy us. Every instant of his life, the Christian struggles against his own human nature, the temptations of the world and the attacks of Satan. Humanly speaking, such a never-ending struggle is tiresome and exhausting—and could very well lead to discouragement or even hopelessness. Faith is the remedy for this fatigue and discouragement, as Christ Himself said: "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

The shield of faith will protect us. For if we believe in God's promises, we will consider our situation, no matter how difficult it may be, as nothing compared to the glory promised to us (Rom. 8:18). We will consider the fulfillment of God's promises, as invisible as they may currently be, to be tangible already. Paul put it well: "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

And thankfully, we are not in the fight alone. God has given us many brothers and sisters in His spiritual army to encourage us and *strengthen* our faith. When Roman armies besieged a fortress, to protect themselves from the hail of enemy projectile fire raining down upon them, soldiers in rectangular formation would raise their shields side by side and end to end to form a huge ceiling of protection. When advancing against an enemy in the field, rows of soldiers marched side by side, in close formation, their shields forming a wall in front of them with their short swords protruding from the narrow gaps. Oftentimes, the enemy didn't stand a chance.

We too must march beside our brethren in the *faith*—using our collective trust in God as a protective ceiling and as an advancing wall against the enemy. And in the end? We win! For as the Apostle John writes: "**This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith**" (1 John 5:4). Yes, just like Abraham, may all of us learn to raise the shield of faith, considering the promises and invisible rewards from above as tangible now—as absolute reality! ■

Breastplate— continued from page 13

Isaiah (59:17). Yet notice what else Paul calls the same piece of armor: “But let us who are of the day be sober, **putting on the breastplate of faith and love**” (1 Thess. 5: 8). As we’ve just seen, it is through faith that righteousness (i.e. true commandment keeping) is engendered and it is through love that it is expressed.

Exploring this further, it is interesting that the breastplate is the item that provides the warrior with crucial protection from the otherwise

at work in the lives of men and women who are truly living by faith.

Amazingly, the Gospel itself is part of the Christian armor (see Larry Salyer’s article, “Shod with the Gospel of Peace,” starting on page 18). So this all ties together. Indeed, as all of our armor is to serve in the pursuit of righteousness, every aspect of it could be called the “armor of righteousness”—and indeed, Paul does just that in 2 Corinthians 6:7. But it is most important to remember that it is the “armor of GOD.” This armor must come from *Him*. Our righteousness must come from *Him*—or it is not

Consider too that the primary organ behind the breastplate is the heart—figuratively the very place where God’s law is to be kept, and kept safe from the enemy.

fatal onslaught of the enemy against the vital organs of the body. Without it, he is susceptible to attack and in very great danger of destruction. It is an indispensable requirement for fending off the searching probes of the adversary. Consider too that the primary organ behind the breastplate is the heart—figuratively the very place where God’s law is to be kept, and kept safe from the enemy.


This understanding is an important part of the Gospel message—and living by it is an important part of its transmission. For genuine righteousness, which comes through faith, is *revealed* in it: “The gospel of Christ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.... **For in it the righteousness of God is REVEALED from faith to faith;** as it is written, ‘The just shall LIVE by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17). We see here that righteousness is a function of the Gospel, a manifestation of the power of God

true righteousness. Always remember that we need the *real thing* to provide reliable protection against Satan’s attacks. We cannot afford to rely on some inferior imitation if we are to succeed in the heat of battle.

Although, as we have seen, righteousness is not an inherently human characteristic, the Bible records that certain individuals did achieve in its pursuit. In Hebrews 11 and other passages, God names many of the righteous men and women of faith, and encourages us, through their example, to understand our part in the scheme of things. This is nowhere better demonstrated than in the example of the “father of the faithful,” the patriarch Abraham. Through *righteous obedience*, Abraham demonstrated his unshakable faith in God (Gen. 22:18; 26:5; James 2:14-26)—and that allowed God to ascribe to Him godly righteousness (v. 23). But as with us, that righteousness came not from Abraham, but from God.

So it is that God, through the working of His Spirit, is actively generating godly righteousness within us in order to later raise us up to His level of existence—in perfect, holy, righteous character. This is the essence of the Gospel of God’s Kingdom and the very basis upon which the commission of God’s Church to preach that Gospel is predicated.

At the final culmination of prophesied events, when Jesus Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and to rule all nations in righteousness, we will join Him in setting the perfect example of righteousness for the nations of the world. And when God pours His Spirit out on all flesh at that time, there will be universal understanding by all people of the liberating Truth of God. Their age-old captivity at the hands of Satan will be removed, and the false teachers will be taken away. All the nations will begin to walk in the way of righteousness—not their *own* righteousness, but *God’s*. For notice what Jeremiah prophesies of God at that time: “Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 23:6).

What a wonderful time to look forward to. The good news of the Gospel of righteousness is the ultimate triumph of right over wrong, truth over error, and good over evil. From the beginning, God’s plan of redemption has been to develop true righteousness within mankind, opening up His very Family to us to share rulership of the vast universe and beyond. What an incredible destiny! May all of us who don the breastplate of righteousness always keep it securely in place over our hearts. And one day, in the words of Matthew 13:43, “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” 

Battle—
continued from page 6

His battle with Satan was the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). But Jesus Christ could not have wielded that “sword” effectively if He hadn’t been intimately familiar with it. It is that same spiritual sword, the Word of God, that Christ will use to smite the armies of

write His Word on our hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16)—we will then be prepared to do battle with Satan, knowing that we *can* defeat him with the “sword of the Spirit.” Like Jesus, we must use verses of the Bible properly—“rightly dividing” God’s Word. In fact, we are commanded to do just that: “Earnestly study to show yourself approved to God, a workman unashamed, rightly divid-

power in us, we can overcome wrong thoughts—and, consequently, wrong actions. For it is our thoughts that *determine* our actions (Matt. 5:22, 27-30). If we sow the right thoughts, we shall reap the right behavior! It has been rightly said, “Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character and reap a

Through prayer, fasting and diligently studying the Word of God, we will not be alone in our struggle against evil. And that is of the utmost importance. For we cannot “go it alone.”

the hostile nations that will fight against Him at His Second Coming (Rev. 19:13-15). And it is by this spiritual sword that all nations will eventually be brought into submission to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom He will establish at the beginning of His millennial reign (Is. 2:1-4; 11:4).

In the New Testament, we often see the apostles defending themselves and their actions by quoting God’s Word. Whether struggling against deceived human beings or directly against Satan’s broadcast, God’s Word is a true and faithful weapon we must always have at the ready: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Jesus Himself said, “The Spirit [of God] gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63 NIV). In fact, the very words He then spoke are now part of the Bible, all of which constitutes the “Word of God.” And Jesus also said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4).

If we study God’s Word diligently—memorizing key verses and, more importantly, letting God

ing the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15 J.P. Green’s Literal Translation).


Through prayer, fasting and diligently studying the Word of God, we will not be alone in our struggle against evil. And that is of the utmost importance. For we cannot “go it alone.” Remember Christ’s words: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruits: for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The Apostle Paul also realized this. In his letter to the Philippians, he speaks to Christians of all ages, saying, “For we worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). Earlier in the same book, he writes, “Therefore... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to WILL and to DO of His good pleasure” (2:12-13). And perhaps the most inspiring verse of all to illustrate this point is found in the book of Hebrews, where we are told to look “unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2).

Through Christ’s Spirit and

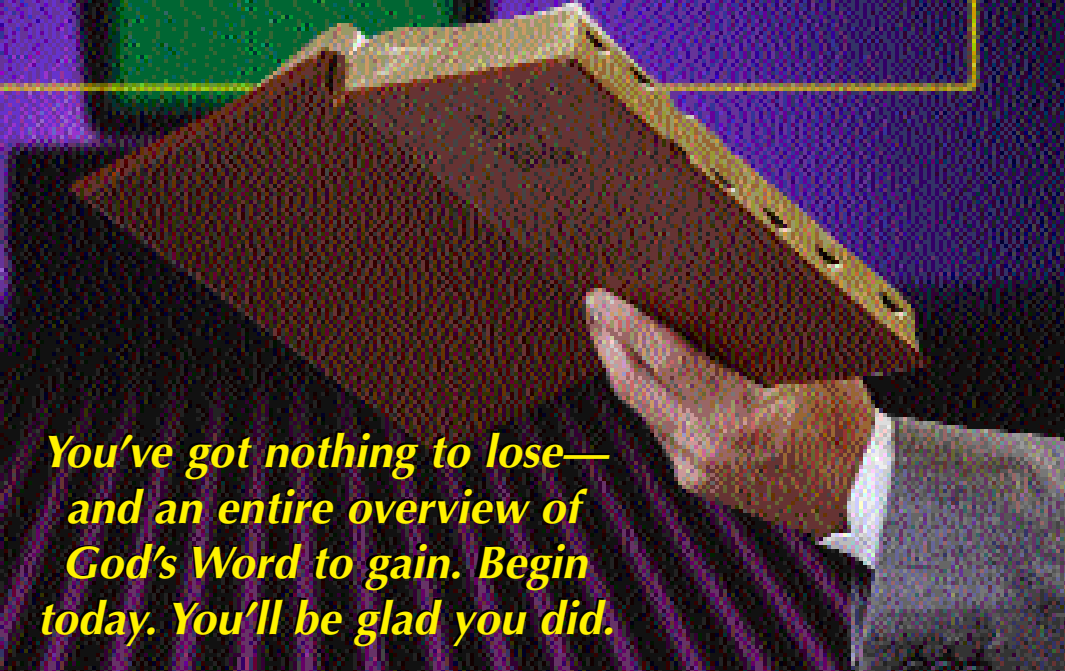
DESTINY!” Therefore we must bring our thoughts under control—“bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Clearly, the only way we can learn to recognize, then *overcome*, the evil impulses Satan hurls at our minds is through the power of God’s Spirit. Most people *allow* themselves to be overcome by temptations. Few remain faithful to God, His law and His true way of life (Matt. 7:13-14).

We must determine not to allow Satan to win the battle for control of our minds! But we can only defeat him by drawing close to God in prayer and occasional fasting, by diligently studying the Holy Bible and then actually *using* this sword—and by relying absolutely on Almighty God and the strength of His Holy Spirit.

What will be the reward, then, of those who overcome Satan, his evil society and their own sinful nature? “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Rev. 21:7). So with God’s help, let us all continue to overcome until that day when the battle for our minds is finally and permanently won. And may that day come quickly. 

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