

The Book of Ephesians

Chapter 6

Ephesians 6 (NKJV)

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ³ ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ ⁴ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

⁵ Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

²¹ But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; ²² whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts.

²³ Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”

Ephesians 6:1–4

On Children and Parents

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Family Leadership

Paul explained the role of the husband, the role of the wife, and the ordained leadership model for the home. Now he addresses the role of children—with a continued exhortation to the fathers.

There is no question about how both the mother and father are harmonized in the nurturing of children. However, herein he added the additional exhortation regarding the father's overarching parental responsibility: "do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." This command provides insight into the what and how of a man's role in the home regarding childrearing.

The husband is the pastor and priest of the home. He is called as a minister (servant leader) to his wife and children. Moreover, he is responsible for the Biblical training of his wife and their children. This fact does not indicate that the mother is not to lead or train the children in Biblical matters. It demonstrates the proper leadership model: The husband and father as head (see 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23), the wife and mother as manager of the home and nurturer of the children (see 1 Timothy 5:14, Titus 2:3–5), and the children being honorable and obedient (vss. 1–3).

The father is not to provoke his children to wrath. Therefore, his leadership should be kind, without hypocrisy, and reasonable. I suggest that a man does not ask his children to do what he is unwilling to do or incapable of doing, nor act impatiently with the growth demonstrated in each child—as each is a unique individual given as a gift from God.

Children Directly Addressed

We should recall that Paul did not instruct men to tell their wives to be submissive. He communicated this directly to the women. He did not instruct the women to tell their husbands how to lead. This command was given directly to the men. Therefore, we should note that framework: he speaks to the children.

Paul's address is given directly to the children. He wrote, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord..." However, we must recognize that the "*children*" must be old enough to read, comprehend, and learn by virtue of the written word of God, the Bible. Until a child comes to that level of maturity, the responsibility to instruct rests on the parents.

Teaching and Training

In the Scriptures we are told to, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6). This proverb is a principle—like many others found in Scripture. The principle is not a guarantee that all children, when instructed "*in the way he [or she] should go,*" will end up where directed. However, the principle stands. Those who are taught in the Lord are far more likely to embrace "*the way*" than those who are otherwise neglected.

This fact is argued by some, but few. It is no surprise that many godly parents have children who have gone astray and abandoned those things given them by their parents. However, principles in the Scriptures are given as rules to follow. Therefore, do not reason about the proverb. Obey it.

Training is more than teaching. Teaching involves the communication of truth. Training is the discipline associated with that which is taught. For this reason, the Lord instructs a parent to provide both. Teaching

involves information. Training is the act of modeling by example and shaping through discipline. One may tell his or her son or daughter what to do or believe, but training is the “taking of the child by the hand” and leading them into “*the way*” they should go. Far too many parents command of their children what they themselves do not, or will not, do. When this occurs discouragement is inevitable and the provoking of the children to wrath is likely. The Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day were guilty of this very sin. Jesus mentioned it when He said, “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*” (Matthew 23:2–4). May the Lord save us from following in their steps.

To the Colossians Paul wrote, “*Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged*” (Colossians 3:20–21).

Hypocritical leadership will always provoke anger and discouragement. Herein a few illustrations might prove helpful.

- 1) A child is provoked when the child’s mother or father is living below the standard they require of the child. For example, if a parent desires to see their child in church, they cannot drop them off at the door—they must take them. If a parent wants their child to keep a clean room, they must keep a clean house. A parent who desires to see their children live for the Lord and walk in His truth must lead by example.

A parent who breaks the law should expect their child to learn by example. A parent who is negligent in spiritual life should expect the child to follow that lead. It is a rare child who can see the errors of a parent and nonetheless follow the principles of the Lord. Moreover, children who are so inclined should be praised. Parents in error should adjust themselves to truth.

- 2) A child may be provoked to wrath or become discouraged when they are required to do that which is impossible. A child who is asked to live beyond failure or shortcoming will feel that they are “not good enough” and often end up “throwing in the towel.” Fathers who desire to see their children succeed not only equip them to that end, but patiently instruct them as they learn. Mothers and fathers who have learned from the Lord will model the same patience with their children they have received from the Lord. Every believing adult knows the patience of the Lord! Furthermore, every believer understands that God does not ask from a believer that which is impossible. We all fall short! God patiently walks us through our failures as we grow. We as parents are called to do the same.
- 3) A child will become frustrated, angry, or discouraged if the parent has ever-changing rules. Consistency is critical in child rearing. If a child has been taught that bed time is 9:00pm and later the parent who has become tired seeks to have the child go to bed earlier, that child will be confused and frustrated. Consistency is key! Before a parent chooses to set a standard, they should carefully consider the rule. Children are more secure if they know what is expected of them. Children feel a sense of security by living within the standards and expectations of the parent. We are all benefitted by consistency.
- 4) Children are profited when reasons for standards are given. Parents who are unwilling to explain the reasoning behind certain instructions may provoke anger or discouragement. For example, if a parent desires to see a child wash their hands or brush their teeth, it is helpful to explain the health

advantages of personal hygiene. Simply saying “Because I said so!” to a child’s request for reason provokes frustration. God has given abundant examples of why He demands obedience of His children. We should learn to parent as He does.

The Problem of Free Will

Every child has a will of their own and will either receive or reject the things taught them. This fact is illustrated hundreds of times in Scripture—beginning early with Adam and Eve. Even though they were instructed directly by the Lord, they intentionally disregarded the instructions given them. Parents with wayward adult children may find comfort in this fact.

We will not neglect the responsibility given to parents, but even those who have served their children well, and/or to their best of abilities, may see them head off in a direction they would never have condoned. However, for many parents, they may see their adult children make poor life choices and later return to those things provided in the foundations of their lives—as communicated in the previously mentioned principle.

Trust the Lord with Your Kids

In the Psalms we read, *“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate”* (Psalm 127:1–5).

A careful look at this passage allows us to see that children are a blessing from the Lord and that procreation is His will. We also learn that it is the Lord who *“builds the house”* and that parents who *“rise up early”* or *“sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows”* are doing so in vain. God desires that we trust Him with our children—*“for so He gives His beloved sleep.”* We are to trust the Lord with our children and allow Him to be God—to them. Sleeplessness and worry is unfruitful. God loves our children more than we do. It is the Lord who will fulfill all His good pleasure in our lives and in the lives of our children.

Obedience in the Lord

Children are to obey their parents *“in the Lord.”* Therefore, should a parent ask their child to disobey the Lord, the child is required to place God’s command above the commandment of the parent.

Long Life and the Law

When Paul told the Ephesians to *“Honor your father and mother, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”* (vss. 2–3 abridged), he was giving reference to the Law.

The passage is found in the book of Exodus. It reads, *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12).

In Deuteronomy the same law is repeated: *“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you”* (Deuteronomy 5:16).

However, we must keep in mind that the Law was given to Israel—not the church! Moreover, in the law there was specified instructions related to the handling of rebellious children. Children who cursed or persistently rebelled against their parents were to be stoned to death.

In Leviticus we read, *“Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the LORD who sanctifies you. ‘For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him’”* (Leviticus 20:7–9).

In Deuteronomy we read, *“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear”* (Deuteronomy 21:18–21).

Jesus recognized and quoted from the law in reference to this commandment. He said, *“For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death’”* (Matthew 15:4).

Apparently Paul had these passages in mind when saying, *“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”* (vs. 3).

Paul was quite aware of the fact that the Law had been fulfilled and thus abolished (see Ephesians 2:15 and Hebrews 8:13). However, nevertheless, he harkened back to the Mosaic standards in order to show the value of obedience.

Paul was not suggesting parents should have their disobedient children executed. However, we can see the value a child may enjoy by learning obedience and therefore right living from faithful parents. Far too much suffering and even early death has occurred among the rebellious.

Consequences of Sin

Parents are to teach their children that sin has consequences. Therefore, they/we are to use discipline as an act of training by love.

In the Proverbs we read, *“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly”* (Proverbs 13:24). Children who learn from godly parents will spare themselves many self-inflicted challenges and consequences. Parents who love their children will patiently work with and train their children—for the benefit of all.

Growth

As parents train their growing children, they must allow the child to make (regulated) choices and even fail. Parents who overly control a growing child's behavior limit failure and short change lessons of suffering and the consequences of sin. However, training of this nature requires wisdom.

A parent must be able to measure the child's readiness for the potential consequences he or she may suffer. If the parent can see that the consequences may be life-threatening or involve a lifetime of suffering, it is best to do all that's possible to disallow the failure. On the other hand, over-control and the disallowance of choice and consequence can be problematic for a developing young adult son or daughter.

God has given manifold examples of teaching, training, and consequence throughout the entirety of Scripture. The most complete example is how he handled Adam and Eve, and/or how He handled/handles Israel. He has, for centuries, given Israel instruction and the promises of blessing for obedience. He has also allowed for the consequences of her disobedience. Even so, parents must allow a growing child to learn valuable lessons.

As parents we desire to teach and train our children by passing on experience and wisdom, but most developing children must learn as most of us did—by experience.

Children who refuse instruction often grow into adulthood and suffer consequences outside the control of the parents. A child does well to learn from his or her parents while young and living at home. Once a child has grown up, the parental training process is fundamentally over. From that point forward, the most a parent can offer is counsel.

Parental disconnect is a difficult transition. As our children grow into adulthood the parent hopes (and prays) that the teaching and training they have done, coupled together with the life experiences from which the adolescent child has learned, will take them into adulthood without the need to suffer greater life lessons.

Honor Your Father and Mother

A child is called upon to honor their father and mother. This rule applies to a growing child as well as to the adult son or daughter.

An adult child may no longer be under the tutelage of the parent—and may have chosen to develop a different set of standards for their own adult lives. However, even within these circumstances the child is to honor their father and mother.

To honor is to place worth upon and to show respect. A child should do all they can to avoid tearing down or defaming his or her parents. A child should never “bad mouth” his or her parents. Children are to be respectful, speak kindly, and treat reverently their parents—even as they would the Lord. A child is to place value on their parents as much as is possible.

For some adult children this is difficult. Children who were neglected or abused will be challenged to show respect and honor. Nevertheless, God commands that all children, regardless of circumstance, honor their father and mother.

Ephesians 6:5–9

On Servants and Masters

“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

Introductory Thoughts

The subject of slaves and/or slavery remains a topic of uneasy discussion. It is offensive and foreign to our concept of fairness and right. The concept of slavery is especially offensive to Americans—having invested time, resources, and multiple human lives in the abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, slavery continues, remains a large industry, and is practiced all around the world.

The Bible does not overtly condemn slavery. This fact is unsettling to adherents of Scripture and is used fodder for critics of the Bible. However, the Scriptures do show how the relationship of master and slave should be handled, clearly showing that God has love for the free and slave and has made provision for the release of those who are bound.

There are several forms of slavery one must recognize. Some men have become slaves by way of self-inflicted indebtedness. Others have been taken captive by the will of another. Either way, slavery is not what God intends for man—and has a plan for the redemption of those taken captive.

An Illustration

It seems clear that God has used slavery to illustrate the depravity of man and our need for redemption. Slavery points to the fact that unredeemed man is in bondage to sin. Slaves to sin are subject to an imprisonment that leads to death. Therefore, man’s hatred of slavery and desire for freedom provokes in us a desire for the redemption found in the Lord. Only in Jesus (our Redeemer) are we provided the freedom all men desire.

Jesus came into this world to redeem men from the bondage of sin—a debt we cannot pay.

The freedom God has provided in Jesus came by the offering of His very life. Jesus paid the debt we could never pay and thereby purchased for Himself those who trust Him for salvation. *“You were bought [redeemed] at a price”* (1 Corinthians 6:20a).

Those who were slaves to sin willingly become slaves to God! *“Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Corinthians 6:20b).

Choose Freedom

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16–18).

The believer comes under the ownership of Jesus Himself. We who have trusted Christ for salvation chose slavery to Jesus rather than slavery to man, sin, or death. Slavery to Jesus is true freedom!

On Servants and Masters – According to the Flesh

The first thing we should note in this passage is that Paul sets the stage for what kind of servant/master relationship he has in view: human. His use of the phrase *“according to the flesh”* places focus on men and women engaged in a human relationship. Paul’s context is not on the spiritual.

On Servants and Masters – Obedience

Secondly, we note that a servant is to do as told. *“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters...”* A servant is to engage a work ethic of consistency, thoroughness, follow-through, timeliness, and competence. The work ethic of a Christian servant should demonstrate integrity in every way. A servant who is not obedient to his or her master is not representing the Lord in a way that testifies to the glory of God. This is especially important when the *“master”* is not a believer. The testimony of the servant will have deep impact on those they serve.

On Servants and Masters – Reverence

Thirdly, we note Paul’s injunction to serve with reverence. *“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling...”* A servant is called upon to be reverent and respectful. A servant is to obey without resistance or backtalk. The master/servant relationship is one of leadership and submission. Believing servants should reflect that model. The *“master”* has the power of discipline over the servant. Therefore, the servant should obey *“with fear and trembling.”*

On Servants and Masters – Sincerity of Heart

Fourthly, the obedience that demonstrates true integrity before both God and man is an obedience of the heart: sincerity. *“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart...with goodwill doing service, from the heart...”* A servant who is serving out of grudging obligation misses the mark. A servant who serves with sincerity of heart will ultimately do a better job and find that service is both joyful and fulfilling.

On Servants and Masters – As to Christ

Fifthly, believing servants are called to serve their masters as though they are serving Christ Himself. *“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ...but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God...doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”* No servant will more quickly serve with sincerity of heart than the one who serves as though

he or she is serving the Lord. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul said, *“whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men”* (Colossians 3:23).

On Servants and Masters – Not with Eyeservice as Men-Pleasers

Sixthly, servants are to serve without hypocrisy. *“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers.”* Those who perform best when the “master” is watching but lollygag and fool around when not being watched are doing wrong. It is said that true integrity is demonstrated when a person acts with honesty, sincerity, and consistency when alone, in the same way he or she would when being observed and accountable.

On Servants and Masters – Sowing and Reaping

Finally, servants who serve reverently, sincerely, honestly, and without hypocrisy are promised blessing from the Lord. For *“whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.”*

Paul told the Colossians, *“he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality”* (Colossians 3:25). Therefore, we see that there is a promise of blessing for obedience but consequence and/or discipline for disobedience. Christian servants should be aware of consequences for disobedience. These consequences are not eternal. They will not be administered in the afterlife. However, they may be handled in this temporal world. The believer’s sins and associated eternal consequences have been satisfactorily paid for at Calvary—by our Lord. However, servants who disobey should anticipate chastening. The Lord chastens those who disobey and blesses those who walk in His ways.

On Masters with Servants – Accountability

Paul does not suggest that masters should be treated with reverence, sincerity, honesty, and integrity, without accountability. Christian *“masters”* must live up to the standards required of servants. The Christian master is not to threaten or mistreat the servant. He or she is called to treat his or her servants fairly and impartially. *“And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven.”* Some might suggest that this instruction to *“give up threatening”* is itself a threat. However, this is no threat! It is a reminder about leadership by example—a warning against manipulation and a reminder of accountability.

Leadership by Example

Jesus said, *“And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise”* (Luke 6:31). As believers, we are called to treat others the way we would like to be treated. If we desire that others are patient with us, we should be patient. If we desire that others are merciful toward us, we should be merciful. If we desire that others speak kindly to us, we should speak kindly. If one is a master, he or she is to treat his or her servants the way he or she would like to be treated. Most importantly, a master is to treat his or her servants the way he or she is being treated by the Lord—with love, mercy, grace, and patience.

Favoritism

Paul uses the fact that God shows no partiality as an example of good leadership. *“And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”* The “master” is to treat every “servant” with the same level of love and grace. A “master” is not to put down, show condescension toward, or unduly mistreat the one(s) he or she finds difficult nor give special favor and privilege to the one(s) he or she finds pleasing. It is understood that one servant may perform better than another and thus be advanced or privileged. However, the advancement or privilege must be based upon just merit. There is no excuse for the mistreatment of the others. All believers are called to love without hypocrisy.

Of Employers and Employees

As mentioned in the opening comments, slavery is especially offensive to Americans. It is foreign to our concept of fairness and right. However, we in America (and in most other countries around the world) have a working model that is not completely unlike the master/slave relationship: that of the employer and employee.

All that we have seen in the teaching of Scripture concerning master and slave can and should be translated to the employer and employee.

Please allow for a little adaptation.

“[Employees], be obedient to those who are your employers according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is [employed or not.] And you, [employers], do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

The correlation is inescapable! Therefore, every employee and employer must follow the pattern Paul sets forth. Moreover, it was important enough that Paul mentions this in several epistles.

To the Corinthians he wrote, *“Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave”* (1 Corinthians 7:21–22).

To the Colossians he wrote, *“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven”* (Colossians 3:22–4:1).

And to Timothy he wrote, *“Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those*

who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things” (1 Timothy 6:1–2). Therefore, we too should learn, obey, and teach the same.

On Servants and Bondservants

During the Old Covenant Dispensation, the Law allowed a person taken into slavery to become a voluntary lifetime “*bondservant*” to his or her “master.”

Moses commanded, “*If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever*” (Exodus 21:2–6).

It seems that Paul may have had this concept in mind when he wrote about his own role in the Lord. You and I, like Paul, have become willing lifelong servants to the Lord. We too have said, “*I love my master...*” and desire to remain with Him. May we all serve the Lord (and those around us) with the voluntary and joyful humility demonstrated in the nature of Jesus, our Lord and Savior!

Ephesians 6:10–20

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Spiritual Warfare—Part 1

In Paul’s concluding thoughts to the Ephesians, he brings focus to the spirit world and the spiritual warfare experienced by every believer.

As simple as it may seem, the Biblical basics of spiritual warfare are missed by many Christians. In fact, the principles of spiritual warfare are discounted as something mystical and therefore avoided. However, the basic principles of spiritual warfare are fundamental, practical, and easy to understand. They should be employed by every believer. If avoided, trouble will result.

A Real Devil

Inasmuch as some deny the existence of Satan, the Bible clearly indicates his existence. Moreover, the Bible tells us of demons, angels, and the very real dimension of the spirit world. The earliest records take us back as far as the books of Genesis and Job. Both tell stories of spiritual warfare. There is no absence of Lucifer (Satan, the devil, Beelzebub, demons, the Dragon, the Adversary, etc.) throughout the entire Bible. The spiritual battle continues from Genesis and climaxes in the ultimate destruction of Satan in Revelation 20.

Power

Paul begins with instruction about where the believer's strength is found: in the Lord. He said, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"* (vs. 10). The believer's strength is not in self. It is not in willpower, positive mental attitude, or in some sort of carnally manipulative formula. God is the source of strength for every believer. He is the only source of power able to protect and give victory over the spiritual forces at work in the world.

Those who are genuinely born again are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are therefore supernaturally prepared to stand in and by the power of God. A believer who knows the true source of spiritual power and grows to trust the Lord will find peace—even during the greatest battles—and will gain the victory over every enemy.

Non-Exempt

Every believer will face spiritual battles. Some will face battles that seem greater and more severe than those of others, but whatever battle one faces, God does and will equip each and every believer for the battle and provide all that's needed for the securing of victory. Satan is no match for the Lord. God has promised every believer an overcoming life by the power of His Spirit—who dwells in us. John wrote, *"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4).

Every believer has the power of God at work *in* them, and the God of power at work *for* them. We are in a no-lose situation. Whatever circumstance comes our way, no matter how the battle looks, God will ultimately provide the believer His perfect and eternal victory. Therefore, *"be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."* The waves may roar, and the boat may fill with water, but God will get us safely ashore (see John 6:15–21).

Peace and Confidence in the Time Domain

The believer's confidence during times of trial will come to greatest maturity when he or she recognizes that victories may not be given on the timeline we desire. However, victory is certain— although some battles will rage until eternity. If we allow ourselves to get overly affectionate with the here and now, we can get out of focus and begin to suffer discouragement or sink into depression. Many believers do! In this context I always tell the believers, don't get addicted to time. Recognizing the distinction between time and eternity will help the believer in many contexts.

I Hate Suffering!

God may allow believers to suffer and experience pain for His own purposes. These are the occasions when trust will grow. We are called to trust the Lord and keep an eternal focus with our mind fixed on Jesus. Isaiah wrote, *“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAHWEH, the LORD, is everlasting strength”* (Isaiah 26:3–4). Paul wrote, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:6–7).

If we as believers fail to see our trials through the lens of eternity (while trusting the Lord), we will suffer a crisis of faith and face a variety of temptations. We may be tempted to think the Lord does not see or care—but He does. We may begin to doubt He is near—but He is. Some may even be tempted to believe there is no God—but He exists! He is present, He loves us, and cares for us, and works all things together for the good of those who love Him (see Romans 8:18–30).

Jesus said, *“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).

The Armor of God and our Adversary the Devil

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (vs. 11).

As we sojourn this life, and as the battles rage, the believer is called to *“put on”* the armor of God. Just like the power we have in the Lord, the armor is likewise provided for us—in Christ. The armor is not our own. It is not a natural equipping. The armor is the spiritual equipment God provides every believer.

Our God-given ability to stand strong in the days of battle will depend much on our equipping and preparedness—a preparedness of supernatural origin and enabling.

A Toothless Enemy?

Within the pages of Scripture, we are told that our, *“adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8b). Many may suggest that he, the devil, is a toothless lion. This is simply untrue! However, his abilities and destructive powers are limited—by the power and sovereignty of God. The believer who goes to battle in the strength of the flesh will certainly fail, but those who battle in the strength of the Lord will stand strong. We stand strong in the armor of the Lord.

The Enemy and Field of Battle

As mentioned above, the battle we face is one of a supernatural nature. *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (vs. 12).

Fundamentally our battles are not with people. Our battles are with the invisible forces at work in the dimension of the spirit—the *“heavenly places”* (vs. 12). These forces often work through the agency of the natural, and therefore Paul reminds his students to carefully discern the who the enemy is, and what the enemy

is doing. Inasmuch as one may rightly recognize an earthly or human foe, our spiritual warfare resides in the dimension of the spirit.

The fact that our spiritual war resides in the dimension of the heavenlies does not suggest that every battle or disturbance is the devil, or a demon. At times our battles are quite human. They may be soulish, fleshly, physical, sociological, philosophical, or political in nature. However, even still, we are called upon to recognize the spiritual nature and origin of the problems we face—and thereby deal with them in and by the Spirit—not in or through the flesh. Fleshly retaliation, manipulation, stubbornness, bitterness, etc., are not the tools of the believer. They are the tools of the enemy. All who wage war using the enemy’s tools—on the enemy’s turf—will fail. The believer must wage war according to the principles of spiritual warfare as described in Scripture—using the spiritual weapons as assigned by the Lord.

Maturity becomes necessary in order to properly discern the what, how, when, where, and why of our human battles. The Lord will lead the humble and listening believer.

The Brain and the Mind

There is a difference between the brain and the mind. The brain is a physical organ and can malfunction just like any other organ. The brain functions through biological, electrical, and chemical influences. It can be affected through physical interactions and by the introduction of chemical agents. Therefore, brain-altering substances can have serious effects on the brain for good or for bad. There are rare but real occasions wherein a person’s brain can malfunction and be assisted through material/chemical means. However, for most people in modern culture, the brain is not what is being referred to when speaking of mental illness. Mental illness is a malfunction of the “mind” not the brain.

The mind is invisible. It is informational. The informational part of each person is stored in the physical brain, and although the two are distinctly different, they are uniquely linked. This is part of the creative work of God. The informational makeup of the mind is like the software in a computer. It can have a virus! If so, it needs renewing and adjusting. In fact, based upon the constant flood of misinformation (and intentionally communicated false information), our minds are in need of continual renewal. The mind is renewed by truth! Therefore, as believers, we are in constant need of the renewal provided by the truth found in the word of God.

Much can be said about modern-day psychology—a so-called science. The development of psychology (the study of the mind) is based upon the spiritually uninformed and anti-Christian humanistic philosophies/philosophers of this world—predating those who are attributed with the formulations of what we know of popular psychology today. Paul addressed this issue during the first century A.D. when he wrote, *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ”* (Colossians 2:8).

Most *noticeable* battles the believer will face are battles for or in the mind—not the brain. Therefore, we must remember that many or most of the battles we face originate in the dimension of the spirit. Even those things thought natural must be viewed through the lens of the spiritual. For this reason, I suggest that the unregenerated (non-born-again) should not be considered as qualified to diagnose or counsel those who have psychological/mental “illness.” The mind is not physical; it is informational. Therefore, counsel must originate in the sound teaching of Scripture. The renewing of the mind must be committed to the Holy Spirit, by the sound teaching of Scripture, qualified students of the Bible, pastors, leaders, mature believers, etc. Counselors who

have been influenced by or embrace the philosophies and the so-called sciences of the mind should be avoided. The enemy of our souls traffics in lies. We must know and embrace the truth.

In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed, *“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”* (John 17:14–17).

As we grow in grace and truth, we become a greater threat to the enemy and therefore a target of his wrath. We should not be surprised by the rejection we may suffer as we move further from the lies of the enemy and closer to the truth. The lies embraced by the world come through the influences of the enemy. The more we know of God’s word, the more we will see the enemy’s lies.

Behavioral Modification

One of the psychological theories being employed by the enemy is the powerful and damaging lie of behavioral modification. Behavior modification can be accomplished in a number of ways: psychotropic drugs, punitive consequences, self-discipline, etc. However, none of these modifications address the issues of the spirit.

Psychotropic drugs affect the brain, manipulate and/or distort the mind, and will affect behavior. For example, anti-anxiety drugs can cause a person to relax and feel a sense of peace. However, they have not and do not address the real cause of anxiety—or how to handle it.

The properly employed principles of spiritual warfare described in the Bible will bring real peace. For example, Paul said, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:6–7). Herein Paul addresses the issues of the spiritual (in this case the mind), not the issues of the physical (the brain). Our mind is to be renewed by the word of God. Paul said, *“...be renewed in the spirit of your mind...”* (Ephesians 4:23). Psychotropic drugs do not renew the mind!

Other forms of behavioral modification may come through punitive consequences and/or self-discipline. Punitive consequences can be simple—like spanking a child. The consequence may change the behavior but may not change the heart, mind, or spirit. A man may be on felony probation and be disallowed freedoms of choice—but still be in the bondages of sin and error. However, a genuine change of mind by the inner working of the Holy Spirit—through the word of God—will bring the change of behavior God intends.

Sadly, those who believe that natural behavioral modification is a solution to the spiritual problems we face suffer the deceptions of the enemy. For example, those who go to Alcoholics Anonymous and see their “higher power” as a spouse, a friend, a job, etc., may stop abusing alcohol but remain spiritually unchanged. An unregenerated sober sinner is a sinner nonetheless—destined for hell! However, those who are born again and experience the fruit of “temperance” (see Galatians 5:22–23), through the power of the Holy Spirit, having God Himself as their “higher power,” will ultimately gain victory in the spiritual war.

Those who trust in themselves and the devices of the world are being cheated and deceived by the enemy—and ultimately lose in the spiritual battle.

Principalities, Powers, and the Rulers of the Dark

The identification of principalities, powers, rulers and spiritual hosts of wickedness may indicate a rank or authority. However, this is not the primary issue Paul is addressing. He is making certain that we all know exactly what we are dealing with: spiritual entities and activities in the dimension of the spirit.

The Bible does suggest rank and authority in the spiritual world—both good and evil. We are familiar with Gabriel, Michael, and Lucifer. All three are created beings who rank above other angels in the spiritual world. We also understand that Lucifer, once an angel in submission to God, rebelled and has thus been cast down to rule in the dimension of “darkness.” He is the highest ranking “official” in the world of the demonic. Michael and Gabriel remain in humble submission to the Lord.

Heavenly Places, Heaven, and Hell

The spiritual world, to which Paul referenced as “*heavenly places*,” is just as real as the natural world. It is not located somewhere distant but is a dimension right here—in and around us.

The “*heavenly places*” are infinite. However, the dimension of the spirit also includes the “*darkness*.” The “*darkness*” is a finite, localized, and limited part of the “*heavenly*” dimension. The “*darkness*” is the “location” wherein the Devil, demons, Hell, and the Lake of Fire exist.

Our Enemy Traffics the Darkness

Our engagement with Satan takes place in “*the heavenly places*” but is limited to “*the darkness*.” Moreover, the battle we wage is indeed “*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness...*” but also against the darkness itself. Therefore, we who know the Lord, living and walking in the light, have a distinct advantage over the enemy. Furthermore, as we engage in any spiritual battle, we properly engage by exercising the weapons of light: truth, righteousness, faith, and prayer. As we do, we obtain the victory.

To engage with the enemy by means of “*the darkness*” will certainly disappoint. For example, if one is to engage the enemy by means of selfish ambition or self-confidence, they will fail. Those who engage by deception will suffer the consequences. We must engage in the Lord—not in the flesh. “*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:4–5). When we engage in battle, we do so in the light, through the light, and by the light. When we do, we will gain the victory—for our victory is in the Lord!

The Evil Day – Your Evil Day

“*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*” (vs. 13).

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he may have had a particular battle in mind. However, the principle remains constant. Any and all trials, temptations, or battles require the application of proper spiritual warfare.

Only a few years later the Ephesians would require a stern warning from the Lord because of their fading love for the Lord (see Revelation 2:1–7). In fact, it seems best to suggest that Paul’s earlier and foundational reminders (see Ephesians 1–2) were provided (at least in part) to remind the Ephesians of God’s great love and redemptive plan—in order to help them with their *“first love.”*

Another option for the future “day” warning may have been related to the “wolves” they would face in their not too distant future (see Acts 20:25–31).

Whatever they faced, and whatever we face, it is clear that we will all experience an *“evil day.”* Moreover, we should be aware of the fact that it will not be a singular battle but many.

All believers will ultimately obtain complete victory. This is our sustaining hope. However, in order to live in victory *today*, we must take up the armor of the Lord and wage the battle—as instructed.

Spiritual Warfare—Part 2

Armor – Use It!

It is not possible to be a regenerated believer and be without spiritual armor. However, the use of the spiritual armor (at least in part) is the responsibility of each individual. Some will suggest that the armor provided to each of us is exclusively the work of God, in and for the believer, and they are correct! However, as we learn and grow, there are attributes and privileges given that must be exercised. For example, a believer may suffer doubt and fear and therefore allow *“the shield of faith”* to be set aside as unused. The believer has the shield! It is provided in the Lord! However, if we begin to believe the lies of the enemy and set aside our trust in God, we will suffer the temporal consequences. Many do! If we fail to wield *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,”* we may become vulnerable to those attacks and miss out on the offensive and defensive protection the sword will provide. Therefore, knowing the word of God and standing in the truth provides a level of protection otherwise forfeited.

Standing in the Lord – and in His Armor

No believer can stand on his or her own. We stand in and by the power of God. A person who trusts in self, lies, human energy, willpower, etc., will see that they are no match for the enemy. We must *“be sober, be vigilant; because [our] adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...”* (1 Peter 5:8–9). Therefore, as believers equipped by the power of God, we are privileged with the tools and attributes needed to overcome the enemy.

There is no question about the fact that all believers will ultimately overcome all the *“fiery darts of the wicked one.”* However, in this temporal world (the condition we are in today), we are subject to temporal setbacks through which God allows us to grow. At times these are the very things God uses to shape and mold us as we are turned on “the eternal Potter’s wheel.” James said, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (James 1:2–4). The trials, temptations, and spiritual battles we go through are used by the Lord to shape and mold us through His sovereign grace and care.

Truth

Pilate asked a powerful and often unanswered question: *“What is truth?”* Therefore, we should learn that “truth” is an exact representation of that which is original. Truth represents, without infidelity, precisely what is authentic.

Jesus Himself was the exact representation of the Godhead in bodily form and is noted as the Word. He is “the truth” (see Colossians 2:8–10 and John 1:1–5, 14). Jesus, in what is known as His High Priestly prayer, prayed, *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”* (John 17:17). Therefore, Paul’s exhortation to *“stand...having girded your waist with truth”* (vs. 14) is nothing less than being in, and standing in, Jesus.

We must have an accurate picture of who Jesus is, all He does, and how He acts. Any misrepresentation or inaccuracy of Jesus is a failure—and is the cause of many troubles. For this reason alone, one should attend to sound doctrine and contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

The Lie and The Liar

Satan traffics in lies. He is the author of bad doctrine, perversion of truth, and false belief. Jesus said that the Devil *“...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 resources, for he is a liar and the father of it”* (John 8:44).

Correct Your Thinking – Sound Doctrine

One of the continuing obstacles a believer will face in the area of spiritual warfare is the battle for a sound mind—the ability to overcome bad thinking implanted through the lies of the enemy. For example, faulty doctrine in Theology (the study of God), Anthropology (the study of man), Eschatology (the study of the end times), Angel- or Demonology (the study of angels and demons), Soteriology (the study of salvation), Israelology (the study of Israel), or some other erroneous thought—all must be corrected!

Correct Your Thinking – Other Lies

Another error many need to correct comes in the form of lies and/or curses we have heard and believe—about others or ourselves. These lies can provide manifold problems!

For example, believers who believe they are in some way or another subject to the control of the Devil (or a demon) need to correct their thinking. Christians are not (ARE NOT) subject to the control of the Devil or any demon. John said, *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). However, a believer who believes he or she is under the control of a demon, gives place to the manipulation of evil spirits and thus allows the enemy limited control. For this very reason Paul said we are to give no place to the Devil (see Ephesians 4:27).

Possessed vs. Influenced

Christians cannot be demon *possessed*. We have been bought with a price and are not our own—we are the possession of Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 6:20). As believers, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We have been set free from the power of the enemy and are therefore free of His control. However, when a Christian *believes* he or she has no control, and is therefore incapable of overcoming the influences of the

Devil, he or she believes a lie, and thus gives place to the enemy's power—whereby one may be made vulnerable to Satanic influences.

Believing the lie of the enemy has caused great confusion among Christians.

A Sound Mind

God calls every believer to overcome erroneous thinking and develop a sound mind, *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind”* (2 Timothy 1:7). To the Romans Paul wrote, *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12:2). As our minds are renewed through the truth, we develop a sound mind and are therefore “girded with the truth” (vs. 14). As a result, we will be freed from insecurities, fears, and the manipulations of the enemy.

Lies are Strongholds

Paul wrote, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments [logismos] and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). The lies we believe are strongholds of the enemy. Through these lies Satan and the demons traffic and take control. Therefore, *“every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God”* is a lie and must be brought into captivity (identified and controlled) and “cast down” (overthrown and removed from influence).

Renewing Your Mind

The greatest resource available to the believer is the written word of God. We are called to study the Scripture. As we do, we will be “renewed in the spirit of the mind” (see Ephesians 4:20–24). However, simply reading the Bible is not a *formula* for the renewing of the mind. The Lord Himself is the one who, through the word and by the power of the Holy Spirit, renews and cleanses our minds. He is the one who cleanses us and washes us by the water of the word (see Ephesians 5:26).

Gird yourself in Jesus. He is *“the way, the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6).

As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, we will grow in soundness of mind and in the freedom God has intended—for all of us.

Spiritual Warfare—Part 3

Righteousness

The believer has been granted righteousness. Like truth, righteousness is of and from the Lord. Every believer is imparted with righteousness at the point of regeneration. One cannot be regenerated unless they *have* believed the truth, and once the believer trusts Christ for salvation, they *have been* granted righteousness. *“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD’”* (1 Corinthians 1:30–31). *“For*

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The believer is righteous! We have been given the breastplate of righteousness!

Positional Righteousness

The righteousness we are granted at the point of salvation is what we refer to as "Positional Righteousness." We are declared righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone—apart from works. This is our *position* in Christ. Paul referenced this when He wrote *"I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith"* (Philippians 3:8b–9). Our positional righteousness cannot be earned. It is a gift granted every believer in Jesus.

The Breastplate

By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, we are forever protected in the Lord. This truth should bring comfort to every believer! The spiritual armor we have been given guarantees safe arrival into the eternal and guards our hearts ("the inner man") in the temporal. This we are promised! However, as is true when considering truth and error, even so there is a practical aspect to righteous living.

Practical Righteousness

Practical righteousness speaks to our daily walk—our behavior. Practical righteousness has our human nature and shortcomings in view. It recognizes the fleshly battle and the trials we endure as we wage the spiritual war in this temporal world. Positional righteousness is a guaranteed condition given us in Christ. Practical righteousness is a daily process. It is a process we will endure until the day we see the Lord—face to face.

Positional Sanctification and Positional Righteousness

Theologians may use the terms "Positional Righteousness" and "Positional Sanctification" interchangeably. However, inasmuch as there is a close relationship, there is a distinction.

Sanctification is an act God performs *for* the believer—just as is imputed righteousness. We are set apart by the Lord, for the Lord, and we are declared righteous by the Lord, in the Lord. However, the distinction is that righteousness refers to our "rightness" and/or right standing in the Lord, while sanctification refers to our being set apart, "holy" to the Lord.

Practical Sanctification aka Progressive Sanctification

It may be correct to suggest that believers grow in righteousness—"rightness" through lifestyle changes, but the idea that one might grow in sanctification has the potential to mislead. Progressive sanctification has led many to believe that salvation/sanctification is incremental. This becomes quite evident in the salvific principles of the Roman Catholic Church—wherein the worshipper is provided salvation by an incremental process—also known by some as incremental grace. This thought has made its way into protestant and evangelical churches. Moreover, for some, the doctrine of Progressive Sanctification suggests that believers are being saved incrementally and are therefore insecure about their eternal destiny. Furthermore, the idea of "incremental salvation" is based upon the "believer's" performance rather than on the complete work of Jesus.

Depending on definitions, some may correctly suggest that righteousness and sanctification may be both positional and progressive—if the proper definitions are given. We are declared righteous at the point of regeneration and yet grow in righteousness as we mature in the Lord. We are sanctified (set apart) unto the Lord by His grace and nonetheless grow more and more into the image of Jesus as we grow away from identification with the world. This is maturity! However, those who suggest that the sanctification of the believer is progressive are leading believers into a works-based, performance-driven Christianity. This is damnable.

On the other hand, practical righteousness suggests growth in the ordained lifestyle every Christian should embrace. It is a recognition that God is at work in us, shaping and molding us, more and more, day by day, into the image of Christ.

Paul said, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified”* (Romans 8:28–30).

God has positionally given us the *“breastplate of righteousness”* and is practically fitting us for it through growth and obedience.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13).

To “work out your own salvation” is to exercise the salvation you are presently experiencing—not your work to attain (or maintain) it. “Working out your salvation” is the exercise of the faith and the salvation you have been freely given—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Therefore, inasmuch as we do grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, we as believers do fall short. In fact, more than falling short by human default, there are times that believers intentionally sin. This should not occur. Therefore, owning the *“breastplate of righteousness”* does not suggest that believers who sin are invulnerable to attack and/or loss of victory in the spiritual battle.

In the processes of our spiritual walk (and warfare), we create problems when choosing to sin. Intentional sinning gives place to the enemy. Many of the “setbacks” we experience in spiritual warfare are the fault of our own doing. We must recognize this and refrain from blaming the enemy for the trials we endure as a result.

Those who blame the enemy for his so-called victories are crediting him with far too much. When we walk in the truth and live in righteousness, we live in victory. When we intentionally sin, we create strongholds for the enemy and the manifold problems that accompany his work.

If a man or woman sins and chooses to leave that sin hidden in darkness, they suffer depression, insecurity, and fear. When the sin is confessed and “turned from,” victory returns. If a man or woman sins and refuses to repent, he or she has by default “set aside” the spiritual armor and is thus vulnerable to the “wiles of the enemy.”

When a believer sins, that believer is subject to the chastening of the Lord. Many fail to recognize this loving discipline and choose to blame the Devil for the lack of peace or circumstantial activity. This must be recognized. Be careful not to attribute all pain, loss, etc., to the Devil. God works—even in our disobedience—and could be using our circumstances to get our attention.

Victory – Nonetheless

We cannot thwart the overall plan of God for our lives. What He has intended for us—in Christ, He will accomplish. As we grow to see this, we will more aptly surrender to the inner working of His Spirit and choose to live in righteousness.

We are the righteousness of God in Christ—live like it.

The Gospel of Peace

One of the great benefits of understanding (and believing) the true Gospel is the peace we experience in our daily walk. When we begin to grasp that we are loved, secure in the salvation God has provided us, that God cannot be disappointed by us but is working all things together for good in order to conform us into the image of His Son, that we are predestined to that end, and that we can rest in God’s overarching and sovereign care of our lives, we will have and experience real and lasting *“peace.”*

When we understand and believe the true Gospel, we grow to see that God can be trusted. We begin to see that all the problems we face and all the attacks of the enemy are insignificant in the light of His glorious and most powerful grace. We will grow to understand why King David could say—even when being threatened by his own son—*“LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help for him in God.’ Selah! But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head”* (Psalm 3:1–3).

When we understand and believe the true Gospel, we will not fear a future condemnatory judgment—nor fear the loss of the salvation provided for us in the Lord. We will grow to understand that the attacks of the enemy can (at best) be temporary trials God is allowing for His own purposes. When we understand and believe the true Gospel—we have peace!

The enemy will throw darts of doubt. He will throw daggers of accusation and condemnation. He will work to convince the believer that he or she is a disappointment to the Lord, that God is angry with them, or that they are in danger of being rejected by the Lord on the Day of Judgment. However, when these attacks occur, his lies will be swallowed up by the *“gospel of peace”* (vs. 15) as we take up the *“shield of faith”* and *“quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one”* (vs. 16).

Spiritual Warfare—Part 4

The Shield of Faith

One might successfully argue that *“the shield of faith”* (vs. 16) might read *“the shield of the faith.”* The Greek contains the definite article. Therefore, we will address the importance of *the* faith and that of faith itself.

Faith and *the Faith*: the Noun

When we speak of “faith” and/or “*the faith*,” we are being descriptive. In this case we use “faith” (“*pistis*”) as a noun. When we speak about the shield of faith, we are describing the protective nature of “*the faith*” and the object of our faith: God Himself. Although the words “faith” and “shield” are both nouns, we understand that there is an activity behind the meaning.

To be sure, Paul would have us understand that our faith must be properly placed. We must place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and rest fully in *the faith* as described in the Scriptures.

Faith can be placed in vain. Faith can be misguided. Faith can be frail, movable, defilable. For this reason, we must properly define both the object of our faith (God), and that of “*the faith*” itself.

Trust (Believe): The Verb

Trust is what we do with faith. It is an action (*pisteuo*). Therefore, faith must be exercised and *the faith* must be acted upon. Simply knowing the facts upon which faith is built is not enough. Even the devil knows the facts and trembles as a result (see James 2:19).

Faith

Both faith in God and faith for salvation are acts based upon revealed truth. Refusal to believe is likewise an act. A man or woman may exercise faith or rebellion—but they do so in response to revealed truth.

Unbelief and rebellion cannot be blamed on God—as though He has made faith and truth unavailable. Neither can man suggest that we who believe are forced to do so against the *limited* free will God has given to every man. (For a briefing on limited free will see addendum 1.)

Paul makes these things clear with a single address to the Romans. He said, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:16–32).

Please notice a few key statements included in this passage: (1) *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...”*; (2) *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood...they are without excuse... they...exchanged the truth of God for the lie...”*; (3) *“they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...”* (Romans 1:16–32 abridged).

Herein we can see that the Gospel is available to *“everyone who believes”* but also that *“the wrath of God”* is justly dispensed to those who *“suppress the truth in unrighteousness”* since having *“clearly seen”* and *“understood”* they are *“without excuse.”*

With these things in mind, we see that unbelief, like faith, is an exercise in which man is privileged to engage. It is neither the fault of God if men refuse to believe, nor is it the causation of God that forces men to faith.

Faith to believe is granted to men by revelation through the gracious acts of God. Man left to himself, on his own, without the glorious revelation of God’s own person, grace, and truth would not nor ever could believe. However, *“the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men”* (Titus 2:11), and therefore we rejoice!

Faith is Not Work

Paul contrasts faith and works succinctly by saying that it is *“by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:8–10).

Those who suggest that believing is work have failed to correctly interpret Scripture. Faith as mentioned above is a noun. *“Saved”* and *“created”* are verbs and refer to God’s *“workmanship”*—not the work of man.

Faith is Not a Magic Formula

Faith is not a magic formula by which we get what we want. Faith is not a tool we use to manipulate the Lord or venture into the dimension of the spirit. Sadly, this seems to be the *“faith”* many embrace—even citing Hebrews 11:1 as their proof text.

The author to the Hebrews wrote, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* However, a misapplication of the verse leads people to believe that the one who has faith can *hope* for something (anything) and therefore receive it. However, the author was telling his audience that what they

had been promised (the New Covenant) had come, and that exercising “faith” in its fruition manifested their trust in God. He was telling them that God had brought to pass what they had been longing and hoping for. It was the realization of what the Scriptures had promised. Therefore “faith” points to “*the faith*” they had been anticipating. It is for this reason he illustrated the anticipated “*hope*” longed for by those listed throughout the remaining verses of the chapter.

The Faith

It has been said that a person who believes may have confidence in whatever god or faith they embrace—as long as they believe with all their heart. However, this is simply untrue! The object of one’s faith must be real, reliable, and true. (Please note the discussion on truth in the lesson titled Spiritual Warfare—Part 2)

The Scriptures plainly tell us that there is only one God and that Jesus is the physical embodiment of His person.

In Isaiah we read, “*You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior’*” (Isaiah 43:10–11).

Moreover, “*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God’*” (Isaiah 44:6).

When writing of Jesus, Paul told the Colossians, “*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power*” (Colossians 2:9–10).

Jesus is the image of the invisible God! Faith in any other is faith built on a lie.

Secondly, *the faith* refers to the Gospel and its associated truths—as revealed in the whole of Scripture. Faith in a false gospel provides no protection at all. For this reason, Paul told the Corinthians, “*I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 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. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!*” (2 Corinthians 11:2–4).

Paul did not want the Corinthians to accept a false Gospel or put their faith in a false Jesus. Furthermore, he did not want them to “*put up with*” such things at all. Neither should we! He told the Ephesian elders, “*I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock*” (Acts 20:26–29).

His concern for their faith is our concern today. We must understand and embrace “*the faith* which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Faith and Trust

Once we are certain of *the* faith (and have been born again), there is the need to grow in trust. As we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, learning who He is, we grow in trust. As we grow to understand His ways, and what He does, we grow in trust. The maturing believer will see that God cares for us—and can be trusted.

All believers will grow to see that there is a difference between faith (*pistis*) and trust (*pisteuo*). One might argue that the differences are subtle, they are nonetheless distinguishable.

As we study the whole of Scripture, we see the stories of men and women who put their trust in the Lord. The people we read about faced the fiery darts of the wicked one. They faced the trials we all face—as the result of the flesh and the devil. As we examine their recorded lives, we can see that inasmuch as few accounts show exemption from trial, all who trusted in the Lord gained the victory and were greatly rewarded.

“Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed” (Psalm 22:4–5). *“For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’”* (Romans 10:11).

No believer is exempt from suffering and trial. However, those who trust the Lord, committing their lives to Him, will come to see that God is their hope in the day of trial—and their peace in the midst of the storm.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah” (Psalm 46:1–3).

Trust is an exercise of faith when we pray and do not see the answers we desire. Trust is confidence in the Lord when times are rough. Trust provides peace in the overall/overarching plan and methods of God.

Any man or woman who endures the attacks of the enemy must trust in the purposes of God. We are told to, *“Trust in the LORD with all [our] heart[s], and lean not on [our] own understanding; in all [our] ways [to] acknowledge Him, and He shall direct [our] paths”* (Proverbs 3:5-7).

God will bring every believer to the understanding that He can be trusted, as the Sovereign Lord, over every area of our lives—and over everything in this world. Nothing escapes His attention and He works all things according to the purposes of His will—and His will is good (see Proverbs 15:3 and Ephesians 1:11).

As we trust the Lord, we will experience the peace and protections found in *“the shield of faith.”* By trusting in the Lord, we will be spared sleepless nights, depression, anxiety, and the temptation to react poorly to the trials we all face.

God is sovereign over all the affairs of this life—over our lives. He alone has promised us completeness and safe arrival into His Eternal Kingdom. God can be trusted!

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving

thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:9–13).

Therefore, take up *“the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Ephesians 6:16).*

Jesus said, *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1–3).*

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Spiritual Warfare—Part 5

The Helmet of Salvation

Of all the “pieces” of Spiritual armor, the first and most important is salvation. This salvation is assumed by the context; otherwise, all the other pieces of armor would be of little or no use in a spiritual warfare environment.

One might argue that truth can be a useful tool in the hands of an unbeliever—and that may be true. However, righteousness apart from salvation is impossible. Peace while plausible is simply a false “calm” perceived through creature comfort. There is no useful faith apart from *the* faith. The word of God being quick and powerful must be wielded by the Spirit in and through the life of the believer. Prayer in and of itself has no innate power of its own. Salvation is the prerequisite to all the other weapons of spiritual warfare.

Safety in Christ

Believers are saved and kept by the power of God. This salvation (as addressed earlier) is the result of God’s sovereign work of grace. Believers (the saved) are those men and women who have trusted Christ for salvation—having exercised faith in *the* faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Therefore, we can see that Paul is re-emphasizing that salvation (*“the salvation”* in Greek) which is essentially the foremost protection any man or woman is afforded. Even those who are deficient in understanding all the elements of truth contained in the word of God, or are living below the righteous standards defined in Scripture, will be ultimately protected in and by the Lord. (There is only so much the enemy can do to the ones who are the recipients of salvation.) God is our protector.

Those who belong to Jesus will be preserved and safely delivered by His power. Every believer will arrive into the presence and Kingdom of our Lord without the potential of failure. God keeps His own! Jesus said, *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).*

Understanding the eternal salvation we have been given should distance us from the belief that all of life is wrapped up in this temporal world. It provides us confidence in the fact that this world and its sufferings are limited to our pre-resurrection existence. The salvation we have been given promises life everlasting in the presence of God—where there will be no sickness, no dying, no grief, and no trial. The salvation we have been promised includes a place and time where we will be free of the Devil’s presence and free from the need to contend with or resist the Devil.

As believers engaged in Spiritual warfare, we are equipped with a “cannot fail,” “cannot lose” perspective. We may suffer temporary setbacks as we engage in the spiritual war, but in the end, we win—by the grace of God! We are guaranteed safe delivery and ultimate victory.

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:11–14). The salvation we have been given is armor indeed!

Have you been born again? Have you trusted Christ for salvation? Do you embrace *the* faith once delivered to the saints? Is your faith firmly placed in the Lord—not in works, not in personal goodness? If not, now is the time to put on the helmet of salvation! Simply trust the Lord and give your life, future, and hope to Him. Confess to Him that you are a sinner and require forgiveness of your sin. Jesus said, *“...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”* (John 6:37b).

The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God

Within the Bible we read that *“the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). In the Psalms we read, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (119:105).

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy we read that, *“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 Timothy 3:16–17).

God has made known to us that His word is not an optional part of the Christian armor. It is the essential lamp that illuminates, the sword that brings discernment, and is the God-breathed standard by which we must develop doctrine, bring reproof, correct error, provide instruction in righteousness, and equip every Christian man and woman of God.

The word of God is complete, and is the essential piece of equipment needed in order to navigate this world, fend off the enemy, obtain the truth that brings peace, and above all—to understand the plan of salvation. It is the perfect description of the One who saves. The word of God is so important that God Himself inspired the Psalmist to say, *“You have magnified Your word above all Your name”* (Psalm 138:2b).

His Word is Truth

As we engage in Spiritual warfare, we must engage with truth—His word is truth. In the Psalms we read, *“The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever”* (119:160).

Earlier we learned that truth is an exact representation of that which is original. Truth represents without infidelity precisely what is authentic. We also learned that Jesus, in what is known as His High Priestly prayer, prayed, *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”* (John 17:17). Therefore, we understand that any misrepresentation or inaccuracy of the truth found in the word of God is the cause of many troubles.

We know that Satan traffics in lies. He is the author of bad doctrine, perversions of truth, and false beliefs. Jesus said that the Devil *“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 resources, for he is a liar and the father of it”* (John 8:44).

The Eternal and the Temporal

The believer’s overcoming power comes as the result of grace through faith. The believer’s *ultimate and eternal* victory is found in Jesus Christ alone through the salvation He alone provides. However, the day-to-day *temporal*, victory comes through spiritual battles via the proper use of the *“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

The Sword – Offensive and Defensive

Paul’s description of the word as a sword shows that it is given to us as a defensive tool and as an offensive weapon. With the word of God, we *defend* against lies, accusations, doubts, and fears. Moreover, with the word of God we *go forth* into the darkness to illuminate and dispel its gloomy and evil effects.

We take the word of God into this world to provide the eternal message of hope no man can live without, and by the word of God, we equip those who embrace it with the truths necessary for day-to-day victory. The word of God is essential—not only for the eternal life provided in *the* faith but also for the day-to-day temporal lives we now live.

Illustrated Practice

In practical illustration of how to use the word of God in spiritual battle, we have the example of Jesus Himself. We read of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness and see that when Jesus endured those temptations He engaged by taking up *“the sword.”*

In John 4 we read, *“Then 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.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”’ 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.”’ Jesus said to him, “It is written again, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God.”’ Again, the devil took Him 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.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve" ' " (1–10).

Jesus wielded the sword and effectively resisted the Devil.

Handling the Word with Experience

When Jesus was confronted by the Devil, He handled the word of God with excellence. Jesus knew what the word said, and also understood its message and meaning. This is critical to the battle. Even the Devil himself quoted Scripture when tempting Jesus. However, Jesus understood the word of God in its proper context and was therefore able to properly and victoriously use it to overcome the enemy.

Satan will (at times) use the word of God against us by manipulating and twisting the truth. Therefore, we must understand and be able to properly apply the word of God when we engage in battle. For this reason, among others, we are given the injunction, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Teaching of Scripture and the Need for Sound Doctrine

Sound doctrine and biblical teaching is losing favor in the world today. Many believers are focused on exciting gatherings, cool music, and entertaining sermons. However, inasmuch as those things can be enjoyable, it is the soundness of doctrine and solid biblical teaching that must take priority.

Paul said, *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables"* (2 Timothy 4:2–4).

A man or woman with an insufficient grasp of Scripture will fail to victoriously contend with the Devil.

Spiritual Immaturity

The author to the Hebrews wrote, *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5:12–14). Sadly, these comments could be made to the majority of Christians today. May the Lord grant unto us a deepening hunger for the word of God!

The Living Word – Christ in You

John's gospel begins by stating, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness... 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 1:1–5a, 14).

These words declare that Jesus is the living Word of God.

Earlier we learned that *“the whole family in heaven and earth is named [in Him]”* (Ephesians 3:15). We know that Paul prayed that God *“would grant [to us], according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith; that [we], being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Ephesians 3:16–19). Therefore we know that the Living Word dwells in us. Jesus dwells in our hearts through faith! Therefore, the Word of God is not simply a sword to be wielded from without, but is actually the life of God Himself living within us to guide, to equip, and to protect.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Peter 5:8–9).

Spiritual Warfare—Part 6

The spiritual warfare every believer will or has faced is not a war to be waged in the flesh. We cannot and will not obtain victory through human strength, will power, or ambition. It is a war that no man wins apart from obedient faith and the manifest power of God.

As mentioned earlier, the first and most important piece of our spiritual armor is salvation. All the other “pieces of armor” would be of little or no use in a spiritual warfare environment—if salvation has not been obtained. Salvation is the prerequisite!

Prayer

From the earliest chapters of Genesis and throughout the books of the Bible, we have a record of men and women communicating with God. Prayer (in the broadest sense of the word) is that communication.

Prayer for Supply

Some may suggest that prayer is conversational—and they would be right. However, prayers of supplication (for supply)—our requests of God— will always be one-sided.

God has no need! Therefore, prayers for supply cannot be, nor will ever be, a request from God to man. God does not require the resources of man. He may ask for our obedience, action, service, etc., but not because of His lack or deficiency. God may seek communications with man from a rhetorical or probing position, but He lacks no knowledge. Therefore, His requests for information are always provided in order to cause *us* to think or answer. God does not “pray to men.”

Prayer is Worship

Prayer is a declaration of dependence upon the Lord. The less prayerful a person is generally points to greater self-dependence. When we feel confident in our own strength, or in our own resources, we will naturally

gravitate toward self-fulfillment. However, when we see our insufficiency and God's greatness, we are prone to seek His help. Prayer is humbly surrendering to and agreeing with God about our weakness—and His greatness. Prayer is genuine worship! Prayer is the humble declaration of our inability and God's omnipotent capability. Prayer recognizes the grace He has made known to us and His great desire to bless us with all that He knows will increase our maturity and bring Him glory.

God delights to answer prayer and delights in our dependence on Him. Self-dependence is a futility we must abandon. Therefore, prayer is worship.

Prayer is Beneficial

God, in His sovereignty, has both allowed for and requires us to seek Him for all we need. Therefore, at times, God will do little for the man who fails to ask—and much for the one who does (see James 4:2). Therefore, prayer is beneficial.

Prayer is Essential

God desires that we seek Him in prayer so that we may understand and know Him as God. He desires that we ask of Him so that we may see that we are insufficient without Him. God commands that we worship Him as God alone so that we are not carried away into idolatry. God's jealousy for our good demands our active communion with Him—that we may enjoy all the benefits He intends to grant us. Therefore, prayer is essential.

Time Set Aside

As we peruse the Scriptures, we see that men and women prayed in diversity of form, in various locations, and in distinctly different periods of time. Some prayed with hands lifted up and others while prostrate on the ground. Some knelt in prayer, some stood, and others sat in the presence of the Lord. Some men prayed in the temple, some in a synagogue, and others in a house. Men and women prayed indoors and out—during the day and at night. Prayers were offered in brief and some lasted throughout a night or for many days. The form, location, or length of prayer is not of importance. The fact that we pray—that is important!

Inasmuch as the length, location, or form of prayer is diverse, much can be said of taking time away from all the schedules and cares of this life in order to spend time alone with God. One will find that spending time alone with the Lord (and in the Word) will be a critical benefit and blessing.

Pray without Ceasing

Time set aside with the Lord is a privilege and blessing. Time spent alone with the Lord compliments our daily continual communion.

As we grow in the grace of God, we grow in our fellowship. We grow to commune with the Lord throughout the day in casual (not irreverent) conversation. We have the privilege of speaking with the Lord in brief and inadvertent conversation—even as we would with a close friend. Continual communion with the Lord will be an encouragement to the day, cause peace and rest of soul, build confidence in decision making, and allow for greater sensitivity to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We are told to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Does Prayer Change Things?

It has been said that “prayer changes things.” It has been said “there is power in prayer.” It has been said that “a man or woman on their knees in prayer is a mighty force.” It has been said that the wise “believe in prayer.” However, without proper context and focus, none of these statements are true. In fact, prayer has no power to change things—prayer has no innate power of its own. A man or woman on their knees is no more powerful than a man or woman on their feet. And, faith in prayer is a misdirected faith.

Prayer as a Formula

When men and women pray, thinking that “prayer changes things,” they fall into a trap that suggests “the power of prayer” is achieved by formulas and human-centered activity. For example, one might suggest that getting two or three to agree together in a specified prayer, praying fervently, praying with perseverance, putting away all sinful acts prior to praying, and praying in the perceived will of God will guarantee that the prayer offered will be effective in obtaining its desired result. However, developing this formula (or any other) puts man in the position of God and God as victim to the man and his or her prayers—He must answer! God becomes the errand boy. All such activity must be put to death by recognizing that God acts sovereignly in accordance to His divine will and purpose. Inasmuch as we may believe we know the will of God on every matter does not suggest we do!

The believer who embraces a formula for prayer, and fails to obtain the desired result, will either cease praying, begin to believe that God does not keep His word, or assume that the one praying must have failed to properly apply the formula and thus begin an introspective, fruitless, and guilt-inspiring self-evaluation.

When Formulas Fail

Consider the following scenarios. If I could get all Christians to agree together to pray that Jesus will never come back to earth, will God answer the prayers of His Church by not returning? If all Christians agree together to pray that God will save the Devil, will God do so? If we pray that God will forgive the sins of an unbelieving, Christ-rejecting man, will He? No! Why? Because the answers to all prayers are subject to the will and purposes of God. All true praying is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The God Who Answers Prayer

In the Bible we are told to have faith in God. Sadly, some put faith in faith rather than faith in God. Believers are commanded to trust the Lord!

Believers are commanded pray to the Lord—and to Him alone (see Exodus 34:12–14). God forbade prayer to the dead (see Deuteronomy 18:9–11). God condemned seeking the help of or praying to a medium, spiritist, etc. (see Leviticus 19:31). Biblical prayer must be directed to God and to God alone.

By the mercies of God, men and women of all ages, nations, people groups, and classes are allowed to “*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). No man or woman should neglect the privilege.

If a person believes “in the power of prayer” and prays to Buddha, should he or she believe “prayer changes things?” What if someone were to pray to Mary or Mohammad? No, and No again! There is no “power

in prayer.” God is the one Who holds the power. God is the one Who, in answer to prayer, changes us, may change our circumstances, will assist us in battle, and provide us all we need—both in this world and in the world to come.

A man or woman on their knees (or in any other position) has no innate power in or of themselves. However, the man or woman who petitions God for power may be empowered as He desires. We are not stronger simply by prayer. We are made stronger when we are empowered by God in answer to prayer. We are not called to “faith in prayer;” we are called to faith in God.

Praying in the Will of God

The Scriptures reveal *much* about the will of God—but without specific clarity on many matters.

God has made clear that it is His will that all believers experience divine healing in their bodies—and all believers will. However, the Bible does not say that God will heal all believers on the timeline of our choosing.

God has designed that a man work and provide for his family. However, God has not specified which job, career, or location He intends for every man. Therefore, even praying “in the will of God” must be accompanied by “if it be your will.” Our praying must include “not my will, but yours be done.” God is sovereign and we must recognize this fact. God is not subject to us, to our prayers, or to our formulas.

Relationship

All believers have the privilege of communing with the Lord—our Creator. We have the blessing of a relationship with the Living God. Intimacy with God, by its very nature, is experienced as we daily, and throughout the day, commune with the Savior. It is the blessing of communion with God that brings greater sensitivity to the leadership of the Spirit, peace in decision making, and the assurance that we are moving as God directs. *“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths”* (Proverbs 3:6).

Prayer and a Change in You

Genuine prayer is life changing. As we agree with God, recognize our dependence on Him, acknowledge His sovereignty in our lives, learn to listen and hear His voice, we are changed in the presence of a Holy God.

Manners of Prayer

Prayer may take on many attributes. The Bible lists several. One may be thought to be enough, but as we study the Scriptures, we discover that the many forms of prayer are of specific blessing to God and beneficial to man.

1. Praise

Praise is a confession. Praise declares who God is. Praise declares what God does. Praise is given by man to God and given by men *about* God. God-directed praise is a form of prayer.

2. Supplication

Supplication is prayer for need or supply. The dependent child of God knows that He is their source. We gladly look to Him for all we need. Supplication may be for forgiveness of sins, daily bread, divine healing, comfort, peace, etc.

Supplication is given with desire but does not require begging or self-affliction. God knows our needs and is pleased to meet all the needs of His children.

When Paul instructs the Ephesians to include *“supplications for all the saints”* (vs. 18), he is calling the believer to intercede on behalf of others for the supplies they need.

3. Intercession

Intercession is prayer on behalf of another. When we pray for those around us, family members, neighbors or even enemies, we are interceding. Intercession is the equivalent of advocating for another or standing in the gap between two parties. Intercession is standing before God on behalf of another.

4. Watchfulness

To be watchful is to be fully awake. As believers we are called to spiritual sobriety and alertness. We are to be spiritually *“tuned in”* to God, to things occurring in the world, and to people around us. Watchfulness comes best to those who take time in prayer and meditation in the things of God.

5. Meditation

Meditation is contemplation on the things of God, on God Himself, and of His ways. Meditation (contrary to popular Eastern thought) is not the emptying of one’s mind or inner self-focus.

6. Giving of Thanks

Giving of thanks is a form of prayer. *“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

7. Prayer *in* the Spirit

When Paul told the Ephesians that they should *“always [pray] with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”* (vs. 18), he was indicating the interaction of the Holy Spirit as He directs our praying.

Prayer led by the Spirit may come as impressions or direct commands from God to man. If so, this is our call to intercede for something or on the behalf of others as directed by the Spirit. We should all take great encouragement by this. If the Spirit of God is moving us to pray for something or someone, it is certain that God desires to answer the prayer as directed.

8. The Prayers of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Great Intercessor. He intercedes for men. He is the one who draws us to the Father—and reveals to us His Son.

The Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered: *“The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God”* (Romans 8:26–27).

9. Prayer *with* the Spirit

Prayer in the Spirit may also include prayers offered through the spiritual manifestation of “tongues” as described in the New Testament. Paul said, *“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding”* (1 Corinthians 14:14–15).

This kind of praying is God-led, God-directed, and God-understood. However, not all have been enabled with this “gifting.” Therefore, prayers of the Spirit, led by the Spirit, and/or with the Spirit, should be sought for and practiced—as directed by the Spirit.

No believer is properly equipped for Spiritual battle who neglects the privilege of praying to the one and only God who answers prayer. Therefore, Pray!

The Economy of God

For reasons beyond our present comprehension, God has designed that His people pray. He will answer the prayers given.

Some might suggest that prayer is unnecessary, for God can do, and will do, as He desires. God is not subject to man or to our prayers. However, throughout the Scriptures we see that God desires we pray! He has promised to answer prayer. We, as believers, will see answers to our prayers—in accordance with His sovereign plan. Therefore, as we engage in the Spiritual war, let us pray *“with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”* (vs. 18).

A Personal Request!

Paul concludes these verses with a personal request. He asks that the Ephesians pray for him. He said, *“[pray] for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak”* (vss. 19–20).

Paul’s prayer was not only in the will of God—but was answered. Paul was bold and his ministry was fruitful! His request for boldness should be the prayer of every believer.

Paul was in prison when writing this letter. There may be a day when we too may request the prayers of others—even as Paul did. Should that day come, I pray we will all be bold, prayerful, and fruitful in the day of trial.

Shall we pray?

(For a detailed step-by-step supplemental on spiritual warfare and the believer see addendum 2.)

Ephesians 6:21–24

“But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”

Personal Thoughts

In concluding this letter Paul added a few personal comments knowing that the Ephesians were concerned for him.

Paul wrote this epistle while incarcerated and herein communicated to personal friends and companions. He desired to encourage them—even though He himself needed encouragement.

Paul had firsthand knowledge of trials and discouragement in ministry. However, he did not give in or give up. His testimony is an example to us all. His concluding remarks show how important it is that every believer has fellowship with other members of the body of Christ (see Hebrews 10:25).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote,

“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart... For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while 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 Corinthians 4:1, 5–18).

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven... Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord... For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again...”

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:1–2, 5–8, 14–15, 18–21).

It is amazing to hear Paul share these words knowing that he himself was *“hard-pressed”*—as much or more than almost anyone in history.

Paul’s concluding remarks—from prison—show that he thinks of others. Paul cared for those he was addressing far more than he did for himself. What an example!

The Messenger

Apparently, Tychicus was the one Paul employed in the delivery of this letter. He considered him a beloved (loved) and dear brother—a faithful servant before the Lord. His arrival with the letter would allow for a mutual communication between the two parties, bringing about needed comfort, and providing encouragement. It is always good when we share positive testimony with one another. It shows us how God is working—in all of us.

Grace, Peace, and Love

“Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen” (vss. 23–24).

The peace of God is unlike the peace this world provides. It is given by grace, through the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, by the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the peace that is far above life circumstances. It is far more than the creature comforts this world may offer. It is the inner peace of a genuine relationship with God.

The love of God, provided to us by grace, is manifested toward us by the revealing, drawing, electing, sealing, redeeming, securing, power of God. This love abides in us by the power and person of the Holy Spirit.

By the grace of God, every believer has been given all that is necessary to *“love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”* The Holy Spirit abides in us, and manifests Himself through us, in love for the Lord and in love for one another.

Paul's final comment places a climactic emphasis on grace. It is by grace alone, in Christ alone, that we stand. It is by the grace of God that we come to know Him, sit with Him in the heavenly places, walk in Him, and stand against the fiery darts of the enemy. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as described in the Scriptures alone, for the glory of God alone, that we live.

Paul's introduction reminded the Ephesians (and all of us) how great the love of God is toward us. He wrote, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:3). His opening phrase provides a perfect starting place. His closing statement ties the knot that holds it all together. *"Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen"* (vss. 23–24).

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ encourage you, enrich you, mold and make you, more and more into the image of Jesus as we grow in our love for Him each day.

How Deep the Father's Love for Us

How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure,
that He should give His only Son, to make a wretch His treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One, bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders.
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice, call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held Him there, until it was accomplished.
His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom,
but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer.
But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.

Songwriter: Stuart Townend

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