

Barnabas

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Spiritual Warfare

WEEK ONE

IN OVER MY HEAD

Ephesians 6:10-13, *“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.”*

The first thing to note in the passage in Ephesians is how extremely important it is to see and approach reality as it really is. There exists, according to this passage, an invisible army of wicked spiritual opposition against which we fight. And it is very important that we realize this truth, or else we will view reality in a materialistic way, only seeing or perceiving that which our five senses are able to see and perceive.

In 2 Kings 6:8-18, we see the importance of seeing beyond the visible to the invisible. If you remember the story, you'll recall that the prophet Elisha had gotten himself in trouble with the king of Syria for continually telling the king of Israel where the Syrians would be attacking, so that the king of Israel was able to prepare and avoid defeat. Because of this, the king of Syria sent a very large army to capture Elisha in the city of Dothan, where he was staying. So early the next morning, Elisha and his servant woke up and found the city surrounded by the Syrian's chariots and horses. 2 Kings 6:15-17, *“So Elisha's servant said to Elisha, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed and said, “Lord I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*

Elisha saw all along what his servant hadn't seen – a whole other realm of existence; a spiritual one in which was Elisha's deliverance. And so if we fail to perceive life on this

level, we'll be duped into thinking that the visible is all that there is. The greatest possible deception is that there is no deception at all.

Secondly, notice that this passage in Ephesians characterizes life in a certain way. Notice some of the language used – “be strong”, “might”, “armor of God”, “able to stand”, “wrestling”, “withstanding”, etc. Life is summed up with one basic word; it is a “struggle” or “battle”.

Now we'd love to think that life is always a bowl of cherries. A kind of a “Life of Riley” existence, meant to be always enjoyed, in which we can relax and work when we choose. This will be basically true for us one day, perhaps, but not in this life. And there are things which remind us of this from time to time – someone is in the hospital, the vacation ends, Monday comes, and your alarm clock goes off at 6:00am – now that's a reminder!!

But thank God life isn't always seen as a struggle for us. Ephesians 6:13 mentions *“withstand in the evil day”*. The “evil day” may be a small or a large period of time – five minutes or five months; but not every moment is called an evil day. But when times like this appear, we can recognize them for what they are – times of worry over our children's safety, waking up with a mysterious depression or lethargy, sudden fear of losing your job, intense concern over the world economy, a feeling that God has deserted you. These are all examples of “evil days” and some of the struggles we all will face.

Now we will note a third important thing about these struggles. Ephesians 6:12, *“...we wrestle not against flesh and blood.”* The real wrestling we're involved in as Christians isn't with human beings. It's not a human problem, not man vs. man. It may be a struggle within man, but not between man. All we need to do is to ask a simple question to illustrate what this means — What do we perceive that gives us the most difficulty in life? From where does our struggle come? From other human beings? The IRS? My ancestry? My temperament? My brothers in my church? My co-workers? My employer? My children? My wife? My in-laws? The answer is none of these according to Ephesians 6:12. These are not our enemies. Our enemies are wicked evil forces which operate in conjunction with humanity (human flesh). But they are not human beings themselves. And unless we understand this, we will be suspicious of others, self-protective, full of spoken or unspoken accusations, bitterness, unforgiveness, and so on. If we don't learn to stand with each other, with common dependence upon the Holy Spirit, against the real enemy, we'll be fighting each other or our spouses or whomever, instead of fighting Satan and his hosts.

Only Christians have the capacity to understand spiritual warfare (1Cor. 2:14). And only Christians can participate as victors. Everyone else is a victim. But so often, in the body of Christ, teaching on spiritual warfare has focused on occultism, Satanism, demon possession, and these “exciting aspects of spiritual warfare”, to the neglect of the day to day battle we face as Christians – the enemy working against the flesh and seeking to exercise indirect control through it. Hostilities, fears, uselessness, anxieties, depression; these are the areas in which we need to learn “to stand”. And only by receiving practical help in these areas can we emerge victoriously.

So, who are these forces aligned against us? According to passages like Isaiah 14:12-21 and Ezekiel 28:11-19, Satan is a fallen angel who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. When he fell, he took one third of the angels with him (Luke 10:18, Rev. 12:4). And they are now organized, in a well-directed attack against God and His people, full of evil purposes. Jesus identified the general character of these forces in John 8:44, *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it”*. Jesus called the devil a liar and a murderer. He desires to malign God and cause the Christian to act independently of God. He desires to produce death. Not only physical death, but also death of the issues of our spirit like boredom, restlessness, despair, frustration, lack of purpose, and false guilt. Satan does this through lies and deceit. His power is aimed at destroying all that God has done. It's ALWAYS totally negative and destructive, never positive, or constructive. He can never build up but can only tear down. And thus, with the Christian, the enemy seeks to negate the glorious position – life and love, which we have all received in Jesus Christ.

Now notice Ephesians 6:11, where Paul mentions the “wiles” of the devil. These wiles speak of his cunning methods, his trickery. Other words used to describe his activity include devices (2 Cor. 2:11) and snares (1 Tim. 3:7); he beguiles (2 Cor. 11:3); resists (Zech. 3:1); deceives (Rev. 12:9); accuses (Rev. 12:10); hinders (1 Thes. 2:18); buffets (2Cor. 12:7); tempts (1 Thes. 3:5); persecutes (Rev. 12:13); blasphemes (Rev. 13:5-6); blinds (2 Cor. 4:4); and devours (1 Peter 5:8). But it is of great encouragement to us to realize that with the whole armor of God we will be able to stand against his wiles. Paul speaks also of *“...not being ignorant of his devices”* (2 Cor. 2:11). And James even tells us that submitting to God and resisting the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). We can understand how he operates and even learn to anticipate areas of attack. This is fundamental to every soldier in warfare. And we can learn the process of victory.

Ephesians 6:10 encapsulates the solution for us, *“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”* Our ability, cunning, determination, resources, knowledge, or wisdom are of no avail in this warfare. We must acknowledge that we’re in over our heads. And it is helpful to know that this has always been the way God intended it to be. He never intended that our strength should suffice (the strength of the flesh). Hebrews 11:32-34 speaks of men like Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, men who *“...subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword and out of weakness were made strong.”* There we have it. God’s strength working in conjunction with our weakness equals victory.

2 Cor. 10:3-5 says it this way, *“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 (false arguments) and every high thing (proud obstacles) that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”* Our spiritual weapons are not Old Covenant or fleshly weapons, means or methods, but are mighty IN God.

And in our warfare, we are “casting down arguments”. These are arguments which are aimed at us and are contrary to our faith, hence, false arguments. What are some false arguments? No one really loves me – if I get transparent, I’ll get rejected – what the Bible says is not relevant to “my situation” – I can’t rely on anyone but myself – I deserve better than I’m getting – I’d better build up financial reserves to be secure – God isn’t involved in this area of my life.

Also, in our warfare we are casting down “every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.” These “high things” are elevated barriers or proud obstacles which come against our knowledge of God. What are some proud obstacles? Independence without any submission – looking out for number one – trusting only “my” view or opinion – my church, town, state, denomination, or liturgy is the best – insisting on one’s “rights” rather than laying them down – the feeling that if they’d have only listened, they’d really have it together. Proud obstacles come from the arrogance of self-centeredness. And as we cling to them rather than cast them down, we’re only “knowing” about God, not really experiencing the true knowledge of God.

What do we do about these things? 2 Cor. 10:5 tells us, “...*bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*”

We’ve finally identified the battleground. It’s in the mind, in the realm of our thought lives. That’s where the attack is aimed. Our thoughts will either take us captive, or we’ll take them captive. The mental onslaughts which come against us will whip us or we’ll whip them in Christ.

When we become aware of the attack against us, we then make a choice to rely on the power of Christ to defeat that thought. We know where it comes from. Now by faith, we allow Christ to make it His prisoner. “Lord, I don’t have the power within myself to defeat this thought. I choose to trust in Your power to take this thought and defeat it. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I rest on Your promise to deal with it.” False thoughts must then be replaced by scripturally sound thoughts.

I will then go on with my life, doing what I’m supposed to do. I trust that He has taken that impulse and freed me from it. The darts may come again very soon or maybe much later. But whenever they come, I must believe that Jesus Christ is sufficient to deal with them decisively. If I seem to deal with these things in my own power, I’ll either eventually realize how ineffective I am and begin leaning on the Lord in each thought OR give up and become a lifeless spiritual desert.

I must realize this warfare and seek to be built up in the strength of Jesus Christ. I must trust Him to give me the right perspective and to cause me to learn day to day, moment to moment. There will be failures, and there will be times when we are tricked badly. Perhaps it will be days before we even realize we’re in a battle in a certain area of our lives. But if we are going to be real, live Christians, we’re going to need to learn how to effectively deal with these forces we face. And we’re going to need to exercise accountability to the Lord in our thought lives, that we might be strong in the Lord and effective in Him.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY QUESTIONS

WEEK ONE

In Over My Head

1. A situation in my life where I need to walk in the Spirit is _____.
2. Specifically, how can I apply, and use, the two-step process (walk in the Spirit) in my life?
3. How can I be accountable to the Lord for my thought-life in this situation?
4. Give and write out, an example of how I can pray (or talk to myself) and walk in the Spirit (say “no” to the flesh and “yes” to the Spirit).
5. Write a paraphrase of **Ephesians 6:12**.
6. What happens if we don’t understand **Eph. 6:12**? (Add my own observations)
7. How do **Eph. 6:10** and **2 Cor. 3:3-5** relate to each other?
8. Give at least 3 examples of false arguments in my own “thought life.”

9. Give at least 3 examples of proud obstacles in my own “thought life.”

10. Take 2 examples of mental onslaughts in my own life and write out how I would take that thought captive, etc.

11. What insights/helps/discoveries/changes/renewal has occurred within me as a result of this study?

Spiritual Warfare

WEEK TWO

CRACKED POT

“PERFECTLY FLAWED”

2 Cor. 4:7-12

As we have spent these weeks discovering and defining the New Covenant, there is now only one question that remains unanswered. “What does the New Covenant, applied in my life on a consistent basis, look like?”

Let’s go back for a moment. The New Covenant is everything coming from God, nothing coming from me. We have seen in detail the craftiness of the flesh. Jeremiah 17:9-10, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doing.”* We have also seen the battle that is going on within us, where the redeemed heart desires to please God, but the “old nature”, the flesh, does not. Then, last week, you saw the greatest mystery ever known to man. 2 Cor. 4:6 –7, *“The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ...in earthen vessels.”* The mystery is not in the glory of God seen in the face of Jesus, but rather what God chooses to place this treasure in – us – earthen vessels.

Let’s note a few things about vessels:

1. Vessels are made to hold something. God designed us to be containers, and we will always be containing something – either full of ourselves or full of Jesus.
2. The vessels called “mankind” are uniquely designed to contain God. Col. 1:27b, *“...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* Therefore, anyone not having the Holy Spirit dwelling in them is less than how God designed him to be or sub-human (Colossians 2:6-19).
3. The vessels God made to contain Him are earthen, that is, dried mud – common, ordinary, everyday “pots”. Clay pots are very fragile and weak. They are of little value in and of themselves.

Why? Why would God place the greatest treasure, Himself, in something so worthless as a “clay pot”? 2 Cor. 4:7, *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”* Here we are given the reason. God purposefully places Himself in us so that other “clay pots”, indwelt with themselves, would see that the value is not in the “pot”, but what it contains. The treasure we hold is Christ in us and this is what makes us special. We “clay pots” will always look for significance in our clay outsides, or our dirt inside. Psalm 103:13-14, *“As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For he knows our frame. He remembers we are dust.”* God never intended us to be anything special as a vessel. We were always just meant to be common so that He, in us, would be the extraordinary one. As people see the “pot” which is just like them, they will also see Christ, who is extra-ordinary, and glorify Him. Our job, as “pots”, is to make sure we are containing Him and not trying to make people notice or pay attention to our “pot”. This is accomplished by being transparent – cracks and all. If we seek to hide our cracks or decorate our pots, then we are not living as God designed us. Another thing the world sees is that we can be triumphant because of what we contain – Christ – rather than what we serve as. In other words, my significance is not my knowledge or service or job or success or anything other than God dwelling in me. Another way of saying this is – “Me, in Christ, equals my identity. Christ, in me, equals my sufficiency.”

The great lie that Satan tells Christians is, “You have to have it altogether to maintain Jesus’ witness that He is God.” Acts 1:8, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* We are being lied to if we think we need to dress up our “clay pots” or even patch them up to make ourselves a better witness. In reality, it is my commonness that will enable people to see Christ in me. People will only see fakes when we try to be something we are not, which is glorious in the flesh. We all face this decision. Do we want people to see our flaws and commonness and God’s perfection, or our phony, self-righteous “pot” and not God? We don’t have to have it all together to show the world that God is real. In fact, we need to get off from our pedestal and BE real.

God has built into the Christian life certain realities that are designed to cause us to be ordinary “pots”, manifesting an extra-ordinary God. In 2 Cor. 4:8-9, we see what these realities are – trials. *“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.”* The Christian life is not a bed of roses, and we are not immune from life’s difficulties. We will go through times of being “hard pressed” – “perplexed” – “persecuted” – “struck down”. The situations and circumstances of our lives at times will be overwhelming and, at times, paralyze us as to what to do with unfair situations and unjust circumstances.

And just as we begin to see cracks appear in our “clay pots”, God will come shining through our stress fractures. As He does this, “**we**” won’t be “crushed” – “despairing” – “forsaken” – “destroyed”. All of this will produce 2 Cor. 4:10, “...*always carrying about in the body the dying of Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*” That is to say, the flesh, with all its self-importance, will constantly have to die for it will be unable to live under strain. As this happens, Jesus’ life shines through.

This new life in our “clay pots” has two beneficiaries:

1. 2 Cor. 4:11 – The life will be manifested in our mortal flesh. This is to say, that we will have the fruit of life and victory. Of course, the cost of this is the death and reign of the “self”, which wants its own way, ego, reputation, dreams, etc.
2. 2 Cor. 4:12 – Our death will benefit others as life will be produced in them.

In summation, the New Covenant is God’s power in our “pot”. God deals with me so that I will see my weakness in order that I might operate in His strength (2 Cor. 12:7-12). God’s plan for “clay pots” is that we will be constantly broken, in order that we might be totally dependent upon what is inside us – to live. In living upon God’s strength and not our own, the world will see Him and NOT us.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE – PART 2

“The Belt of Truth”

In one part of this series, spiritual warfare demon possession was mentioned briefly. It may not have occurred to many of you that this is an uncommon phenomenon in America today. With a little bit of thought we can see why. 1 Timothy 1:4 gives us a clue to the answer, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.*”

What this scripture is saying is that in this period, called the “latter days”, there are hosts of invisible evil forces which are involved in the business of changing people’s thinking patterns. The enemy is seeking to control the minds of men. And his campaign has been very effective in the U.S. No wonder demon possession isn’t that common. The devil’s goal is to control people, whether it is directly or indirectly, by influencing the way we think. Our culture has been deluged with lies about humanism, materialism, mysticism, sexuality, the epicurean philosophy, and so on. Satan has been very effective in masking his attack by his wiles (Eph. 6:11), snares (1 Tim. 3:7), and devices (2 Cor. 2:11). Why should he need to be more overt?

It is of great comfort, however, for us to realize that Jesus has stripped the power of the enemy, which even includes his power to deceive. Jesus, Himself, speaks of this in Luke 11:21-22, “*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in*

peace. But when someone stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoils."

The "strong man" here is Satan. His "palace" is the world (2 Cor. 4:4). His "goods" are mankind itself (1 John 5:19). And the "stronger one" is Jesus Christ Himself. He has overcome the wicked one, taken from him his defenses (his armor) and has divided his spoils. No one else could have done it, least of all the goods themselves. Mankind, being in the grip of alien powers, has no strength to deliver itself from the strong man. But it is the testimony of the New Testament that Jesus Christ has done just that.

Consider the following verses:

Hebrews 2:14b – *"...that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil."*

Acts 26:18 – *"To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."*

Colossians 1:13 – *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."*

1 John 3:8 – *"For this reason the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."*

Perhaps **Colossians 2:15** demonstrates this truth the most graphically, *"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"* (the cross).

If we can imagine a great New York City type ticker tape parade with the streamers, confetti, and wild roaring crowds, we'll get the picture here. Now in our mind's eye, we see a majestic looking, triumphant figure standing in the lead car. And walking doggedly behind that car is a slumping, chained figure, who is being followed by scores of other figures, all of whom look very badgered, forlorn, and defeated. Jesus Christ is the one receiving the crowd's adulation because He is the victor over all of these powers of hell, who have been defeated in the cross. This is exactly what took place 2000 years ago in the spirit realm when Satan's doom was sealed.

The fact is that these evil forces are finished but will not admit it gracefully. This helps to explain that which seems very puzzling to many Christians. That is the fact that even as Christians we can become demoralized, almost totally discouraged, or perhaps more miserable at times than before we ever knew the Lord. The reason? We are the only ones who are seeking to even oppose these forces! We're the only ones who have the potential capacity to *"put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Eph. 6:11). The armor is God's solution to the problem. It is that which makes us victors rather than victims. Without putting it on, however, we won't be able to

stand. James' admonition to "resist the devil and he will flee from you" will not accomplish anything until we first submit ourselves to God by taking up the armor He's provided.

Let's not go into a study of the armor itself. It will be apparent to us as we study that each piece is a particular aspect of Jesus Christ and His work. When we hear the phrase "Jesus is the answer", we're hearing the truth. He is. And each piece of the armor shows us how He is the answer. Putting on the armor of God is putting on Jesus Christ. Romans 13:14, "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*" Realizing this fact is very helpful because it keeps us from becoming mechanical in our application of the armor. For example, when I was very new in the Lord, I knew a girl who used to go through the physical motions of putting on a suit of armor. She did this every morning, right along with Ephesians 6. Well, I thought that was such a good idea that I began to try it. But very soon it became a technique, a mechanical exercise which lost its meaning. But realizing that the armor is Jesus Christ means that I am relating to a person, not a technique, and that helps a lot.

The armor, of course, is modeled after the armor a Roman soldier would wear. And Paul, being a prisoner in Rome when writing Ephesians, had the opportunity to observe Roman armor often. I can imagine that as he did, the Spirit was speaking to him about spiritual warfare and God's weaponry in Christ.

There are six pieces in the armor of God made up into two divisions. The first division consists of three pieces – the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of peace. These pieces consist of what was done in the past. They are what each believer receives the moment of conversion. Notice the verbs in Ephesians 6:14 and 15. They are in the past tense – "having" girded your waist with the truth, "having" put on the breastplate of righteousness, and "having" shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This past tense is the aorist tense in Greek and signifies action completed in point and time. Because these are past tense and have happened to each believer, they are things which simply need to be called into remembrance daily.

The second division of the armor also consists of three pieces – the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. These are pieces which we are to "take up" in the present. We're to "take up" the shield, "take up" the helmet and "take up" the sword. We'll discuss that more later. It is also very important to note, however, that the order of these six pieces is important. It can't be altered. One would not begin with the sword, for example. It is always necessary to begin with the first piece, the belt of truth. And so we will.

Paul says, "having girded your waist with truth". Girding the waist was an action which symbolized the soldier's readiness to fight. The soldier wore a long skirt, like a Scottish kilt, which would severely hinder his mobility. It was necessary to gather his skirt together

and fasten it at his waist with the belt. Then he'd be ready to fight. So, when we're attacked, or when we're preparing for attack, we must begin with this – the belt of truth.

What is truth? It is reality, the real or true state of things. It is fixed, certainly. It contrasts with many movements and/or philosophies today which claim the "truth". Truth contrasts with humanism, physical fitness, TM, wonder diets, ESP, Mormonism, the peace movement, the work ethic, materialism, drugs, etc. All of these claim to hold the truth. Each would have us believe that participation in them will answer the questions of life. But none really answer the definition of truth – the real or true state of things. At best they contain some truth as one small aspect of life. At worst, they are downright lies and contain virtually no truth.

The punch line, however, is that there is something that totally answers what we have defined truth to be. Jesus Christ Himself is the truth. He is reality, the real or true state of things. He is fixed/certain. And others said this of Him:

John 1:14b – *"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

John 1:17 – *The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

And He said it of Himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me"* (John 14:6).

When I came to Jesus Christ, I found the truth behind everything. I discovered ultimate reality. I found the One who is true, but the One who is true actually found me. And in Christ are all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is the answer for man's most searching questions – "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "How did I get here?" "What am I here for?" Only Jesus Christ provides these answers and only Jesus Christ answers the definition of truth. The belt of truth is the ultimate reality, which all who place faith in Christ discover. This is what is meant by 1 John 5:20, *"...and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."*

The question that naturally comes up next is "How do I know that? How do I know that Jesus Christ is the truth?" Let's look at five points which help answer that question.

First of all, I know Jesus Christ is true because of what He said. He said things which are so radical, they boggle the mind. Take the beatitudes as an example and carefully notice how there is not one single appeal to man's ability to live them out. And Jesus taught these things with so much authority that the crowds were astonished at His teaching (Matthew 7:28-29).

Secondly, I know Jesus Christ is true by what He did. His miracles, His death and ultimately His resurrection, all prove that He is the Son of God. Christ rose from the dead on the third day, as He himself had predicted. Without the resurrection, our faith is meaningless and we're still in our sins.

Thirdly, Jesus Christ is the truth because He fulfilled over 70 specific prophecies, all of which were written at least 300 years prior to His birth. Peter Stoner, in his book Science Speaks, has outlined the mathematical probability of any one man fulfilling that many prophecies. The odds are absolutely staggering. Yet Jesus fulfilled those and many other less major prophecies, all just in His first coming.

Fourthly, the fact that Jesus Christ is a man of history shows that He is true. There is more documentary evidence concerning the life of Christ than any ten pieces of ancient literature combined!

Fifthly, I know Jesus Christ is the truth because of what He's done for me and thousands more! In every part of this world, there are "born-again" Christians, all testifying to the same basic explanation of their experience – they have had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, a radical, life-transforming meeting with the Son of God. And He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He always has been and always will be the truth!

When I was a new believer, I had an exchange with one of my best friends. I was telling him why I'd become a believer in Jesus Christ. I said to him, "Rick, the reason I am a Christian today is because I'm absolutely convinced that Christianity is true, and that Jesus is who He said He is." And that is still the reason why I'm a Christian. And it is extremely important that every believer settles this issue personally, once and for all. As Josh McDowell puts it, "get a satisfied mind".

But what is important is that I call this into remembrance every day. This will be extremely helpful to me when I'm under attack. In John chapter 6, when the peer pressure was to leave Jesus in a time of testing, Jesus asked the disciples a probing question, *"Do you also want to go away?"* And Peter's answer was so true. He said, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (John 6:67-69).

What Peter is saying is, "Lord, we haven't any other options. You're the truth." And so, when I'm under attack I begin by realizing that I'm in the truth in Christ. When going through hard testing, I begin by remembering that Jesus Christ is the truth, and I'm in Him. He is the ultimate reality. Though all else may fail, He will not because He is fixed. He is certain. He is the belt of truth.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY QUESTIONS

WEEK TWO

Spiritual Warfare: Part 2

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- As a result of the teaching, “The Belt of Truth”, be prepared to discuss:
 1. What does **Colossians 2:15** say to me about my own feelings (i.e.: despair, defeat, depression, giving up, etc.)?
 2. What is necessary for us to stand firm?
 3. What results? (Give specific examples from either personal observations or from the teaching.)
 4. List some of the specific ways the devil’s deception has appeared to you.
 5. Why is the “Belt of Truth” an important piece of the armor of God?
 6. How may we put on the “Belt of Truth”

Spiritual Warfare

WEEK THREE

THE BREASTPLATE

Ephesians 6:14

There are six pieces of spiritual armor which we have been given as believers, each of which represents different aspects of the person or work of our Lord. The first three of these were given to us at conversion. We simply need to call into remembrance that which has happened to us in Christ. The first of these pieces is the “**Belt of Truth**” which is the assurance that Jesus Christ is (ultimate reality). He is fixed and certain. He is true. And when we come to believe in Him, we meet the One who is the reason for all things. This is a stabilizing influence in our lives. And as we call this into remembrance, it gives us the right perspective and the true view of reality. Confusion and distortion are wiped out when the belt is in place.

The second piece of the armor is also in Ephesians 6:14, the “**Breastplate of Righteousness**”. This too, is something that was given to me at conversion and it is very important that I bring into my remembrance daily.

Let's begin our study of this aspect of the armor by laying out our definition of righteousness. What does it mean to be righteous? It means being in the right; having right standing before God; being acquitted; forgiven; fully measuring up to God's requirement of me; being “worth something” before God; existing in the state of right relationship with God; being an object of God's love. All these statements help define what is meant by the believer being righteous. **The focus here isn't acting righteous but being righteous.** Acting righteously is the subject of Ephesians 4:1 – 6:9. Being righteous is another subject and has to do with my standing with God. God has done something for me in Christ which I could not do myself. He has given me the gift of righteousness, the gift of worth. All of this is because of what Jesus Christ did 2000 years ago when He died, was buried and rose again.

Since righteousness is a gift, we can summarize the “**Breastplate of Righteousness**” by saying:

1. **It is not attainable by obedience to the law.** Romans 3:20, *“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*
2. **It is not attainable by fleshly effort.** Romans 3:23, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
3. **It is not attainable by works.** Romans 4:4-5, *“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who works not, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”*
4. **It is attainable only by faith in Jesus Christ.** Romans 3:28, *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”*
5. **The basis of this gift is the death of Christ.** 2 Cor. 5:21, *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

Ephesians 1:6-7, *“...to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...”*

Colossians 1:21-22, *“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight...”*

Righteousness is a gift of God, that was given to me the moment I was born again! And this gift is a vital part of the spiritual armor God has given me to equip me in warfare against the devil. I must remember that it is mine, and that when I came to Jesus initially, I didn't come on my own works or merit. Neither did my unrighteousness prevent me from coming to God. I came just as I was, and God accepted me in Christ. And it's the same way now. God still accepts me on that basis. At this very moment I do not stand on my own righteousness, and I never will. God loves me as much now as He ever has or ever will, apart from my performance, or lack of it. Why? Because He does! He has simply chosen to do so and has carried out His plan to love me in Christ.

Notice that this righteousness is called the “breastplate” of righteousness. The breastplate was that piece of armor that protected the Roman soldier’s heart and inward parts. And so, the breastplate of righteousness protects my heart, my inner man, and my emotions. It protects me from Satan’s attacks of false guilt or condemnation. Through the breastplate, I’m kept from the plague of feeling God is always angry at me, or blaming me, or expecting much more out of me than I’m giving Him. It helps me to realize that I am not perfect, and God accepts me that way. And this gift of the breastplate also provides tremendous assurance and confidence. I have a definite sense of worth. I, Dale Lewis, am worth something. It was good that I was created because I know that God loves me (see Psalm 139:13-18).

Condemnation vs. Conviction

Satan, however, is the accuser of the brethren and is constantly attacking us with lies which rob us of the joy of this truth. False guilt, or condemnation, is his main weapon. It’s false guilt because it is not aimed at real sin that I’ve committed but aimed at me personally. The attempt is to get me to focus on myself – my failures and my inadequacy – instead of God’s love, acceptance, and mercy. And the way Satan does this is to point out to me all that I’m not doing. This is in direct contrast to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. When I’ve sinned, the Holy Spirit will point out specifically what I’ve done. The focus isn’t upon me at all, but upon my sin. And there is a hope that when I confess the sin, then fellowship with God will be restored. Conviction is specific, aimed at sin, and produces hope. False guilt is very general; it is aimed at me as being worthless and produces despair of ever being able to do anything about it.

One of the common patterns of false guilt in my life has been because of “sins of omission”. Many times, I would set up a standard for my own behavior that was greater than God had set up for me. And then I’d feel guilty when I couldn’t live up to it. This is false guilt because God didn’t command me – I did. So, when I failed, it wasn’t failing God, I was failing my own standard. The resulting guilty feelings weren’t legitimate. For example, suppose I’d set a standard of playing with my kids every night for a half hour when I arrived home. And when it wasn’t possible to do it one evening, I slumped into feeling guilty. True or false guilt? Well, that would be false guilt because it was my standard, not God’s. Nowhere in His Word does He tell me to spend half an hour per night with my kids. Of course, God’s answer to condemnation or false guilt is the “**Breastplate of Righteousness**”. He loves, accepts and forgives me in Christ. And there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

God is now merciful to my unrighteousness. He doesn't overlook sin when it occurs but is merciful as I confess it to Him (Hebrews 8:12). And God is not desirous that I feel or carry around any guilt feelings. He is my Father, not my judge, all because of the cross.

Positive Commendations

We can see from the life of the Apostle Paul how he used the “**Breastplate of Righteousness**”. First, there were many positive things in his life which he might have been tempted to depend upon for his own righteousness. We will call these positive commendations. He lists some of them in Philippians 3:4-6, *“...though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning (zeal) persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”* But even more than these things, there were his many achievements as a Christian. He'd cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, led many people to Christ, founded many growing churches, had an apostolic calling and authority, experienced powerful personal revelations from God, supported himself in ministry, and suffered much for the cause of the gospel.

But it is interesting to notice that he totally rejected these credentials and accomplishments as having anything to do with his righteousness or standing before God. This is what he said in Philippians 3:8-9, *“But indeed I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom 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.”*

Negative Condemnations

Also, there were some negative areas of Paul's life which would tend to condemn him before God. We'll call these things negative condemnations. Things Paul also had to deal with by using the “**Breastplate of Righteousness**”. He was suspect as an apostle (not being one of the twelve); he was not personally impressive (2 Cor. 10:10); had a disfiguring physical ailment (Gal. 4:13-15); and had worked very hard yet was rejected by many in the churches, especially Corinth. But probably more than any of these, he had to deal with hangovers from the guilt of the past. Why? Because Paul had been a persecutor of the church! It's easy to imagine Paul preaching in many different cities and running into family members of those he'd put to death. That would be very difficult to deal with, yet he did, by remembering who he was in Christ. 1 Cor. 15:9-10, *“For I am the least of the apostles,*

and am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

So Paul was able to reject his positive commendations as a basis for righteousness and also was able to face his past and attacks upon his own person, all because of the "Breastplate of Righteousness".

And as long as I'm seeking to stand on my own righteousness, I'm in trouble. My heart is vulnerable. I seek to prove my worth by being more zealous, dedicated, or sacrificial than anyone else. When I'm rejected or misunderstood, I need to explain myself and carefully defend my own actions and motives. No one must think badly of me. And if I sin or stumble, I must go through a bunch of steps to "get back" with God, instead of relying on the finished work of the cross. But the good news of the gospel is that I'm free from guilt in Christ.

The story is told of Richard Foster, a Christian author. One day he realized that he'd "stood on his rights" many times in his life and was determined to make sure it was dealt with. So, he made a long list over a period of days of every incident in his whole life in which he could remember doing that. After compiling the list, he went to a close friend to show it to him. His friend then read the list carefully and did something which was a very powerful expression of forgiveness. He tore the list up into hundreds of tiny pieces! That is what God has done for us in Christ, "...*having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" (Colossians 2:14).

The accusations will come. The attacks will come. Expect them. And then let us "put on the whole armor of God" that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY QUESTIONS

WEEK THREE

The Breast Plate

- As a result of the teaching on “The Breastplate of Righteousness” be prepared to discuss:
 1. Summarize righteousness and write how to explain it to a ten-year old.
 2. Write specifically how having on the “breastplate of righteousness” effects my concept of God.
 3. List some specific ways in which I’ve been plagued by “false guilt” or condemnation.
 4. List how I’ve been tempted to use “positive commendations” to commend myself to God.

5. List some “negative condemnations” which have sought to condemn and discourage me before God.
6. How does the “breastplate of righteousness” protect us?

Spiritual Warfare

WEEK FOUR

SHOES AND SHIELD

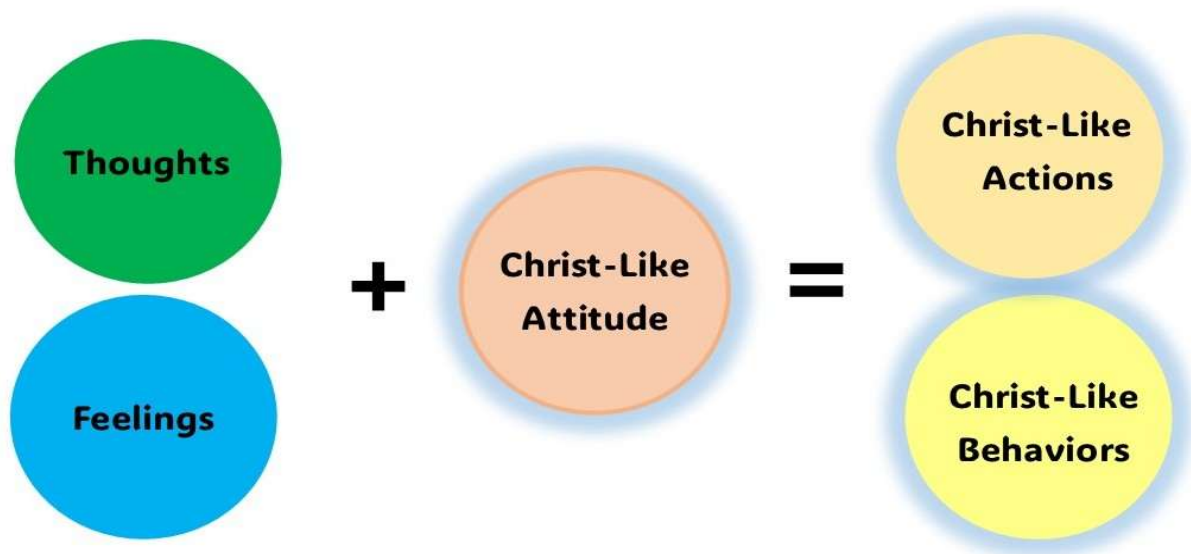
Ephesians 6:15-16

Before we investigate the next pieces of the armor of God, we need to remind ourselves again that spiritual warfare is primarily in the realm of thoughts and feelings that we have on a day-to-day basis. Because that is true, it is vital that we learn to deal with our thoughts and feelings on that level, before they have a chance to turn into attitudes, then into actions and/or behavior. That is always the logical progression of thoughts and feelings if left unchecked. Proverbs 23:7, *“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”* Also Proverbs 4:23 says, *“...keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs forth the issues of life.”* If we were to put this down in diagram form, it would look like this:



Although this process has happened in me many times, there is one example I remember which really stands out in my mind. When I was teaching a home Bible study there was a brother, named Dave, who always came into the studies with his wife, Georgia. Well, Dave would come and listen but would hardly ever smile or nod his head or give any kind of body language which I might interpret as positive feedback. And since we really didn't spend much time with each other, I had no way of knowing how he really felt. So as time went on, I began to feel very uncomfortable when Dave was there. I felt he didn't like me, and I began to develop an attitude that Dave was only coming because of his wife. And that he was unteachable. Inside, I was both hurt and angry over this. The whole thing lasted for months. I would avoid talking to Dave, would keep from looking his way during the teaching times, etc. Finally, it got to be too much for me, so I confronted the situation. I said, "Dave, is there anything I've done to you to separate us in our relationship? What, if

anything, is wrong?" And to my total surprise, he told me that I'd done nothing to him and that he loved me and was blessed by my teaching. What a lesson for me! This whole process was just in my mind. The enemy had created a huge barrier between two brothers in Christ. And it all started with a thought, then a feeling which became an attitude, and then ultimately translated into a behavior. What I needed to do was to deal with it early, when the thoughts first came. I needed to trust Jesus Christ to deal with them and to have a truth-based relationship with my brother. This is what the process looks like when dealt with in Christ:



In order to deal with our thoughts and feelings, however, we need to acknowledge them. It does no good just to suppress them and hope they'll go away. We must be honest with ourselves and with God. For instance, read David's example in Psalms. He freely poured out his heart, even to God. Read Psalm 77:1-20. In that Psalm, we have a beautiful example of how David worked through feelings of anxiety, doubt, disillusionment, depression, and despair and came out in victory. But he wouldn't have come out in victory had he not acknowledged and dealt with things on the feeling and thought level.

Keeping that in mind let us now move on to the third piece of the armor of God in Eph. 6. Ephesians 6:15, *"...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace."* As we retain the symbolism of the armor being parallel to the Romans soldier's armor, we realize how important good shoes are for fighting in a battle. First, shoes provide protection for the feet in traveling on difficult surfaces like stones or ruts in the ground. Can you imagine trying to run with bare feet on ground like that? Also, the shoes provide firm footing while in the mud, for going up hills or even for going down them. This was particularly true of shoes of the Roman soldier. His shoes were like heavy leather sandals with long spikes driven through them which would be like modern football cleats.

With these shoes on, the Roman soldier could travel on even the most difficult of terrains. And the same is true of us as we have on the “**Shoes of Peace**”. We have firm footing in life, stability, and traction, even though the rough mountainous landscape of trial and in the muddy, slippery surface of temptation.

What is it that our feet are shod with? According to Ephesians, it's with the “preparation” of the gospel of peace. “Preparation” is the Greek word “hetoimasia”, which Thayer translates as “readiness” or “preparedness”. Hence, the phrase means “having your feet shod with the readiness which is produced by the gospel of peace”. It speaks of the result of the gospel in our lives – **PEACE**. This peace is what makes us ready for anything life can throw at us.

So already we've learned that Jesus Christ is the “**Belt of Truth**”. When I come to Him, I found Him who is ultimate reality. Also, we've seen that Christ is our righteousness – our “**Breastplate of Righteousness**”. I am loved, forgiven, and accepted by God with all of my weakness and shortcomings because of what Christ has done. And now we see the result of receiving that gift of righteousness, which of course, is peace. This is exactly what is said in Romans 5:1, “*Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God.*” Now, in Christ, there is no longer a war between God and I. The gap has been bridged, and reconciliation has been made. Now instead of being enemies, God has become my ally. The king of the universe is on my side, is now for me, and will be with me always (Romans 8:31; Matthew 28:20).

Now because I have peace with God, I can experience the peace of God. My heart is at peace, knowing that God is for me. It is not God that my struggle is against. Now I can have good courage and good morale in life. There is an inner calm, a positive sense of well-being which has come through the gospel of peace. As a result, I'm ready for anything – no terrain is too tough. No circumstance or attack can come into my life which the Lord and I can't handle. No job, responsibility, ministry opportunity, trial, or commitment is too much to handle because God is involved. Of course, the enemy seeks desperately to rob us of the joy of this truth. He'll try to deceive us into thinking that we're all alone, or that God has abandoned us, or that we're going to have to face this situation without Him. Satan will try to convince us that God is angry at us and expects us to get it together first, then He'll step in and receive us back. But these are all lies. If God were to deny us, He'd be denying Himself because we've been sealed by His Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 2:13).

Not only is God with me in the battle but because I know that He is now **for me** and that He loves me I can freely let God into **any** area of my life, to change it. I can be courageous and face life and myself honestly because if God be for me, who can be against me?

So when I'm attacked in the realm of spiritual warfare, I can stand strong by putting on the whole armor of God. I begin by calling into remembrance the “**Belt of Truth**” and work my

way down to “peace”. I can’t begin, with trying to feel calm, but I’ll end up there if I’ll start with truth. Jesus will prove again that He is my peace.

The next piece of the armor listed for us in Ephesians 6:16, “...*above all, taking the “Shield of Faith”, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” Notice that Paul says “**above all**”. Without this piece, the other pieces of the armor won’t do us any good. Above all, we’re to take up the “**Shield of Faith**”. Now we’re in the “present tense”. We’re to “take up” the shield now, in order to defend ourselves against the “fiery darts of the wicked one”.

Don’t be surprised that attacks come against you. Expect them; it’s the devil’s nature to attack. Jesus said they’d come. He said that in the world we shall have tribulation (John 16:33). Peter said in his first epistle, that we shouldn’t consider it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange things were happening to us (1 Peter 4:12). What is happening is that God is using the devil as His tool to accomplish His purpose in our lives, which is to form us into Christ’s image and increase our love dependence upon Him. So when attacks come, we need to quit griping and complaining and begin putting on the whole armor of God that we might stand firm.

What are these fiery darts? They are thoughts and impulses towards evil which come into my mind, having been put there by the enemy. They are **not** the result of me seeding my mind with junk or lies. Doing that is to invite the devil to use my mind as a playground and scripture says we’re not supposed to do that (Ephesians 4:17-24). But fiery darts come for no apparent reason and at even the most inappropriate times. They can be gross immoral suggestions, sudden overwhelming fears or anxieties, severe disillusionment, sudden impulses to commit some kind of sin, or can even be powerful doubts about the reality of Christianity. (Doubts are not the opposite of faith. We can have faith and still experience doubts at times. Doubts prove that I have faith. What is it that’s being tried when I go through a trial? My faith, right? So, the very fact that my faith is being tried proves that I have it!)

These fiery darts can come even when I’m in prayer or reading the Bible. They can come while performing some ministry function. Many times, I’ve been teaching and off the wall, thoughts have come into my mind. Now if I do not see these as being fiery darts, I’m making a serious mistake, and the enemy will have accomplished his purpose.

Actually, there are **two characteristics** of these fiery darts. The **first** is that they **seem** to come from us, rising up out of our own thoughts. Oden Fong said it well in one of his songs, “...well I think that it’s me thinking that I shouldn’t go to church, even though my soul is aching and drying up with thirst”. The problem with me thinking that these are my thoughts is that I’ll begin to begin to doubt my own relationship with God. How could I be a Christian and think these things? And I’ll probably plunge into self-blame and condemnation because of them. I’ll seek to repress them and not think about them

anymore. But deep inside they're doing their damage, and I start feeling alienated from God. We need to deal with them straight on. We need to recognize their source and take up the **"Shield of Faith"** to quench them.

The **second** characteristic of fiery darts is that they're always attacking our position in Christ. They attack Him being our truth, righteousness, and peace. Consider the serpent's attack upon Eve, *"yeah, hath God said?"* (Genesis 3:1). Satan was seeking to get Eve to doubt God's integrity and purpose. Also consider the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, *"...if you are the Son of God"* (Luke 4:3). There the attack was upon Jesus' relationship with the Father, at a time when Jesus would be most vulnerable. How evil Satan is! He plants a thought in our head and then tells us we're not a child of God because we thought that way.

Our defense is to take up the **"Shield of Faith"**. What that means is that we simply **act** upon what we believe in specific situations. I might believe that Jesus Christ is the truth and that He is my righteousness and that He is my peace. But faith goes beyond that and says **"therefore"** to what I believe. There's a helpful example of this in Mark 4:35-41. You remember the story – Jesus had gotten the disciples in a boat and said, "let us cross over to the other side (of the lake)." So, they set off and soon the wind arose, and the waves beat against the boat, filling it with water. All the while Jesus was sleeping soundly in the stern, seemingly unconcerned and indifferent towards what was going on. Now if we could suddenly stop the action and interview these men about who Jesus was and how He felt about them, I'm sure they'd all say that He was their Master and that He loved them. This is what I'm sure they believed. But if they were to use the **"Shield of Faith"**, they'd go beyond just what they believed. They'd say, "Wait a minute. Jesus is the Son of God and He told us we're going over to the other side, not under to the other side. Therefore, somehow, He will deliver us." Of course, that wasn't their reaction, but it would have been had they taken up the **"Shield of Faith"**.

It's also extremely important what I'm placing my faith in. I do not have the liberty to make up my own menu of what I ought to believe. I must place my faith in the clear-cut teaching of the Word of God; what the whole counsel of God is on a subject. For example, the Bible doesn't teach me that I'll never get sick or that I'll always get healed of everything. But it does teach me that even if God should choose in His wisdom **NOT** to heal me, He still loves me and desires to work the work of His Spirit in my life. If I seek to place my faith in something I make up for myself and it doesn't happen, I'll get disillusioned and begin to doubt God.

But praise the Lord that there are certainties, which I can absolutely bank on, no matter what the circumstances. And that certainty is that Jesus is the Son of God, that He loves me and that He's for me.

When the fiery darts of doubts and disillusionment come, when I'm being hit with outrageous thoughts, I can take the "**Shield of Faith**" and say, "Hold on there. Since this is true, then this also must be true."

David again gives us an example from his own life in Psalm 27. In this psalm, the wicked are coming against him seeking to wipe him out. But all throughout the psalm, David is triumphantly resting upon that which he has learned to be true of God. Psalm 27:1, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"*

Ray Stedman says in Spiritual Warfare, "...at this point we'll have very little difficulty overcoming evil if we'll start with the first four pieces of the armor." And yet there's still more, as we learn to "take up the whole armor of God".

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY QUESTIONS

WEEK FOUR

Spiritual Warfare: Part 4

- Based on the teaching “Shoes and Shields”, be prepared to discuss:
 1. If I were serious about applying the illustrations about David and feelings to my life, what specific things would I do (i.e.: prayer)?
 2. Give specific examples of the process: thoughts/feelings $\frac{3}{4}$ attitudes $\frac{3}{4}$ behavior, in my life.
 3. List the specific point(s) which strike me as crucial regarding “shoes”.
 4. List the specific point(s) which strike me as crucial regarding “shields”.

5. Give a specific example of an area in my life where the devil's fiery darts are attacking or have recently attacked me; how I could have/can use the "shield of faith" and verses I can claim to minister to me.

Spiritual Warfare

WEEK FIVE

THE HELMET AND THE SWORD

Ephesians 6:17

It is very important for our Christian lives that we intelligently consider the process of putting on the whole armor of God. The reason why, of course, is that the armor of God describes Jesus Christ Himself and He is what the whole Christian life is all about. We must learn to put “**Him on**” in our lives if we’re to be effective Christians who are able to stand against the wiles of the evil one.

Keeping that in mind, it’s helpful for us to recognize that the first three pieces of the armor as listed in Ephesians 6 refer to a specific theme which is “**me in Christ**”. These pieces have to do with my identity and position as a believer. The second three pieces of the armor also refer to a specific theme which is “**Christ in me**” and how that specifically applies to my life. That’s interesting, isn’t it? “**Me in Christ**” equals my identity and “**Christ in me**” equals my sufficiency.

With that as background, we now arrive at the next piece of the whole armor of God, the “**Helmet of Salvation**”. Ephesians 6:17 says, “*...and take the helmet of salvation.*” Again, this is something I’m to “**take up**”, in the present tense.

In a war, a helmet is a very valuable piece of equipment. It protects the head from injury and gives the soldier the ability to do things he couldn’t do without one. Spiritually speaking, the “**Helmet of Salvation**” also protects the head. It protects the mind and intelligence. It preserves the Christian’s ability to think or reason and keeps the believer from mental confusion and darkness; it keeps the head clear. How important is this in a day when everyone seems so confused. Man having abandoned the Word of God as a solid basis for answers has plunged himself into a hopeless sea of perplexity as he seeks to live life without God or absolute truths. Even those individuals, who “seem” to have answers,

end up admitting that they really have none. There are millions of answers to millions of problems, and the great thinkers of our time are busying themselves contradicting each other! The problems of man are just too big – population control, the economy, the inner-city crime, world hunger, crumbling educational systems, etc. – there just aren't any answers that man himself can come up with.

Moreover, there is the mental anguish we all feel when we stop to honestly evaluate life as it really is on this planet. The world itself is victimized and dominated by man's fallen nature. How can we go on killing babies while we seek to save the sea otters? How can the television producers fail to see the connection between their immoral programming and the breakdown of the family in our country? And how helpless do we feel when we realize how little we really have to say about economic control over our own lives? Obviously, there are so many more questions we could ask. And these could wipe us out if we didn't have the "**Helmet of Salvation**" to give us clear heads amid life's insanity.

So, what kind of salvation is referred to by the "**Helmet of Salvation**"? Well first, it's not referring to past tense salvation. That was the subject of an early part of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:8-9, *"...for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."* Neither is the "**Helmet of Salvation**" referring to present tense salvation which is the present deliverance over sin and bondage to it.

What the "**Helmet of Salvation**" **IS** referring to is "future tense" salvation; a time of future deliverance and victory which all believers in Jesus Christ will be a part of! Here are some scriptures that back this up:

Romans 13:11, *"...and do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time that we awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed"* (future tense).

1 Thes. 5:8, *"...but let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation."*

Romans 8:20-25, *"...for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for*

what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."

When will the believer experience this type of salvation? Only when Jesus Christ Himself returns and restores all things; then we will experience the consummation of our redemption and come into that glorious liberty of the children of God. All of this tells us what the "**Helmet of Salvation**" is – it's the hope of the return of Jesus Christ! This alone alters our perspective so that we can see clearly and still be effective in a dying world.

Of course, scripture is full of these truths. In the New Testament alone there are over **318** references to the return of Jesus Christ. He **IS** coming back. And history **IS** heading somewhere. God **IS** ordering world events to usher in the final consummation in Christ. The hearts of the kings are still in the hands of the Lord (Proverbs 21:1). God knows about the world scene – He knows all about inflation, all about an emerging one-world government, all about the suffering in the world. He hasn't forgotten. He **IS** doing something about it. The prophetic picture He told us about is rapidly unraveling. Man, on his part, will ultimately put all of his hopes in the government of Antichrist thinking that mankind itself will be able to usher in a so-called "Age of Aquarius". It might even seem to work for a short time but God's solution in Jesus Christ is the only ultimate answer, when "*the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ*" (Rev. 11:15). MAN WILL NOT HAVE ANY PART TO PLAY IN THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION, IT IS ALL FROM GOD. And I must put my hope in Him. That's what the "**Helmet of Salvation**" is.

Because there are many churches today who say nothing about the second coming of Christ, many people do not understand the world's problems from a prophetic perspective. They say that the book of Revelation is a closed book when in fact the word "revelation" means unveiling. God means to unveil to us His plan and His Son. Two problems arise when a Christian fails to put on the "**Helmet of Salvation**" and live in the hope that it brings. Number one, Christianity becomes just a "social" gospel, and much energy gets expended trying to find "human" solutions for our problems through science, government, technology, philosophy, psychology, religion, and other humanistic methods. Secondly, for those Christians who've abandoned hope in man, the result is despair. Where is it all heading? What will happen to me and my family? What about jobs in the next twenty years? How will we make it? The focus is then off the Lord and on us.

But when Christians put the “helmet” on, there is renewed hope in Christ. Again, there is a proper orientation. This is what happens when we hear a “last days” message on prophecy and suddenly everything seems to come back into focus.

Obviously, Satan hates this doctrine because it represents his final deathblow. And being a robber, he’s not at all happy when we’re full of the joy of the hope of Christ. And what Satan has done to nullify this doctrine is to get Christians so divided over the particulars that many are just turning off and tuning out when anything at all is said about the return of the Lord. We must not allow him to succeed in this because it will hinder our walks with Jesus. We need to have the “helmet” on so that we’ll realize that as Christians we’re on the winning side and so we’ll be able to have insight into the evils of the world, war, cults, heresies, the suffering of the weak and innocent, etc. We’ll be able then to have compassion and offer hope to those who are victims of this fallen world instead of being so burdened by the immensity of the problem.

As Christians with the “**Helmet of Salvation**” on we should not:

1. Retreat into a protective capsule telling everyone they are going to hell saying, “I told you so!” Just kick back and wait it all out.
2. Rise and fight by joining all the anti and pro-organizations trying to solve the world’s problems.
3. Ignore world events and refuse to vote, burying ourselves like an ostrich with its head in the sand, hoping it will all go away.

But we should:

1. Learn to identify with people involved in all the different causes on all the levels of life to be salt and light to them (Matthew 5:13-16).
2. Be empathetic and try to feel what people are feeling. We have hope and we should be ready to give an answer to all who ask us for the reason for the hope that is within us then we can tell them of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15).
3. Possibly it will even involve us in some good causes if the Lord leads us, not so much for the cause itself, but for the people in those causes.
4. Be ready to be rejected for our stand. When people find out about why we have hope they may or may not like it. They may even become hostile. But if we are rejected, we must make sure it’s because they’re rejecting Jesus not because we’ve

been obnoxious or because we didn't show love. Remember that Jesus was the friend of sinners. If people don't want to continue with us because of Jesus, let's make sure it's their choice to do so, not ours. That may hurt us, but we must be ready if it happens. (Matthew 5:10-12)

So let us take up the “**Helmet of Salvation**” and go on in our study to the last piece of the armor of God, “...*taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17).

This is an extremely important piece of the armor because it speaks of Jesus Christ making Himself available to us through the sayings of His Word. It is by the Word of God, the Bible, that we can understand specifically what it means to know and follow Jesus Christ. Our experience of God must be based upon His revelation to us in His Word and not the other way around. We do not try to make the Word of God agree with our experience. It is by the whole counsel of God, as found in the Bible, that we can bring our lives into the perspective that God desires for us. And the total of the Bible's message to us has to do with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:16 states this principle very well, “...*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*” Notice that it says, “the Word of Christ”. That's because the Bible presents the person of Jesus. Christ and Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, present the Bible. There is no separation of authority between either one. The Word of God is equal in authority to Jesus Christ, and of course, the reverse is also true. Problems arise in the life of the believer who attempts to exclude either Jesus or the Word. When one attempts to follow Christ without the Bible then there is no real focal point for that person in his/her walk and he/she could possibly become deceived, tripped up into an experience-oriented walk or not grow because of a lack of specific instruction. And when one attempts to follow the Bible without Christ, the Christian life becomes reduced to a bunch of principles and conformity to the letter of the law, to the neglect of a personal relationship with Jesus Himself. We must maintain a balance in our lives and not separate the two.

Getting back to Ephesians 6:17, we need to take note of the word, for “word”, as it appears in the Greek. It isn't the word “logos” which refers to the complete utterance of what God has said. But rather it is the word “rhema” which refers to a specific saying of God. This word emphasizes an experiential use of the Word of God, a time when the Word

of God comes flashing into the mind by the Holy Spirit. It can be a whole passage, a truth which is alluded to in the Bible, or merely a quotation from a portion of a verse. But it is for use in specific situations in our lives as we follow the Lord.

This “rhema” can come to us in many varying and different ways. It can come while sitting and reading the Bible, a sudden powerful truth just seems to jump off the page to meet a specific need in our lives. It can come while listening to a teaching or to a word of prophecy. One thing that is said will stick out to us so obviously, hitting a need right on the head. Or it could come during a time of temptation or a time of doubting. The “rhema” could come during a season of seeking God’s direction or just doing normal activities, like mowing the lawn or fixing the car. Or we could be sharing the gospel with someone when things start popping into our mind to say which we’d not even even thought about. God can use His Word “to speak” to us in many ways. He is not limited at all in His variety. And we have each had our own unique experiences of how God speaks to us as individuals.

Of course, the true values of the “rhema” of God, or “word of the Spirit”, is when we take it up and use it, when we respond in obedience to those verses which come to us or when we use it to be effective in other’s lives. The beautiful thing about all of this is that it is the Spirit of God who is using the word in these ways. As we look to the Spirit, He will do His work of making the Word of God practical in all of life’s circumstances. So, the burden is off of us to make the Bible relevant. That is the Holy Spirit’s job. And He will surely do it.

The “**Sword of the Spirit**” then, has value for me as it defends, protects, convicts, and convinces me. And it also has value for others as it pierces their hearts, removing demonic deception or veils they may be hiding behind. This is why I read and study the Bible not because I have to, but because I need to. I need to study in order that the Spirit might recall it to my mind whenever I may need it.

The Bible is always being attacked for these reasons. Either its authority or its significance is constantly called into question. This leads many not to take the Bible seriously. Or to ignore how it might specifically apply to life itself. But we can’t just ignore it. It’s the Word of God and ignoring scripture is equal to ignoring God Himself. We must use the “**Sword of the Spirit**”, the “rhema” of God as it comes to us. We need to obey it, be familiar with it, and take it seriously. As the song says, we need to “trust and obey – for there’s no other way – to be happy in Jesus – than to trust and obey”.

REMEMBER:

The Bible presents Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, presents the Word of God.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY QUESTIONS

WEEK FIVE

Spiritual Warfare: Part 5

- As a result of the teaching on the “Helmet and the Sword”, be prepared to discuss:

1. What is the “helmet of salvation” and what does it mean?
2. What specific effect does that have on my way of thinking/on my priorities/on my concerns?
3. What are the two problems for the Christian who fails to put on the “helmet of salvation”?

How have these problems affected me?

1. How specifically might having on the “helmet of salvation” affect me as far as being the salt of the earth and the light of the world? (See **5:13-16**)

2. List some specific way in which the “rhema” of God has come to me or does come to me.
3. How should I respond to the “sword of the Spirit”? Are there any specific current examples of this in my life?
4. How does the teaching on the “sword” affect my personal approach to the Bible?

Spiritual Warfare

WEEK SIX

DO ALL THIS IN PRAYER

He was considered a “pillar of the church”. In his sixties, graying and knowledgeable about the Bible, this elder had all the necessary requirements to be held in awe by younger Christians, and they did. Deference was always given to his views in adult classes and congregational meetings. He enjoyed great power. Thus, it may surprise you to learn that, in an unguarded moment of uncharacteristic transparency, the elder confessed that his prayer life was virtually nonexistent.

The purpose of that story was not to be critical of our brother. Instead, that elder expressed a self-evaluation shared by virtually all Christians – our prayer life is woefully weak.

Oh sure, there have been times when, following a Bible conference or a special speaker on prayer, we’ve made resolutions to discipline ourselves. A regular time of the day is set. Long lists of needs are made. We may even construct an altar or a quiet place aside from the rest of the house.

But our resolve fades. Guilt sets in. And we adopt a pious face to hide our self-condemnation. We may even be critical of others when we learn that they pray infrequently – what a convenient cover for our own sense of failure.

As Ray Stedman has suggested, our failure is a result of violating our basic human nature. We begin with the “doing” instead of the “thinking”. We start with schedules and programs, which result in legalism. But we need to start with our thoughts. The Apostle Paul has provided some specific help in starting with our thoughts first. How did we put on the “**Belt of Truth**”? We think of Christ as the source of truth in a world of counterfeit experts. We recall certain words that He spoke to reveal truth to us:

1. John 6:35, *"And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."*
2. John 8:44, *"...(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."*
3. John 12:25-26, *"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."*

This is why the Apostle Paul has listed these pieces of armor in the order of belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and dagger (sword). As we review previous teachings on each piece of armor, we discover that we must always be in our thought life. 2 Cor. 10:5 has stated that we must *"...take every thought captive and make it obey Christ."*

Sure, there's a place for discipline and methods, lists and schedules. I'm all for it. But first, we must begin with our thoughts. And this may result in calling our thoughts into accountability dozens of times a day, applying certain verses to each situation, and then praying about what that means to us, how it relates to our thoughts. That's the proper place to begin rather than with methods.

Prayer is not preparation for battle. Prayer **IS** our spiritual battle, where cosmic forces clash in a struggle over our souls. Until we comprehend that fact, we'll continue to be deceived. Our prayers will be pathetically superficial. We'll pray primarily when we want God to be our genie to bail us out again. We'll be subject to powerlessness, doubts, confusion, and an infantile view of God's power. We'll simply end up talking to ourselves much of the time. Believe me, that makes for a dull conversation.

Ephesians 6:18 says that we're to put on all the pieces of armor listed in verses 14-17. Prayer is the way we think about each one, what it means to us, how it applies. There are three principles of prayer in this verse.

1. **OUR PRAYER IS TO BE CONSTANT**: "Pray on every occasion." As I said earlier, this may mean calling our thoughts into accountability dozens of times a day – when my spouse grunts at my breakfast greeting, a driver cuts in front of me at a stop light, a fellow student calls me a dirty name, my girlfriend compliments another boy, a thought pops into my mind about a wrong sexual desire, criticizing someone,

cheating my employer on my expense report, or how pathetic I am compared to those whom I consider to be more handsome, intelligent, or persuasive.

The Christian “lifestyle” is **ALWAYS** aware of God’s presence; that I belong to Him, no longer to myself, that I’m in His family, that I have constant access to Him, that all of heaven’s resources are at my constant disposal.

That is what it means in 1 Thes. 5:17, “...pray at all times.” We can choose between confusion and clarity; deception and direction; being a victim or a victor. Notice also that we’re to pray constantly “...as the Spirit leads”. Sure, Jesus sits at the right hand of God. But his Spirit remains here within us. It is that very Spirit of Jesus who helps us to pray. We may feel inadequate, dumb, inarticulate, or powerless. We may not even be able to recall a verse or a promise of God on which to stand. But Christ’s Holy Spirit will lead us. Romans 8:26-27, “*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit 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.*”

God has provided the Holy Spirit to help us because we’re so spiritually vulnerable and weak and exposed to the effects of spiritual warfare. We can count on the Holy Spirit to communicate our feelings, not our words to God. He knows our hearts and will deliver their message. Then when our frustrations or despairs or hurts or fears are so deep that we can’t adequately express ourselves, the Holy Spirit does it for us.

It’s been amazing for me to see how my prayer life has changed since I learned that the Holy Spirit leads me as I pray. I’ve learned to realize that He places names of people in my mind several times a day as a means of prompting me to pray for them. It is common for Donna’s name to pop into my thoughts and I will pray for her. Then, when we share at day’s end, I learn that my prayer strengthened her as she counseled someone.

Brothers, are you getting the message? We’re simply not lonely islands drifting in the world’s ocean, far from heaven’s shoreline. That’s what the devil wants us to think. But the Holy Spirit is right here, right now, every moment of the day. There is simply no situation in which we must be alone, relying on our meager rations.

One final thought. You may wish for me (or someone else) to lead a seminar on the how, when, where, and why of prayer. We don't learn how to pray in six easy lessons. We learn how to pray when we constantly turn over our thoughts (captive) to Christ as they occur.

2. **OUR PRAYER IS TO BE PERSERVING:** *"...keep alert and never give up",* the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:18. We're to practice what the apostles modeled for us. Every great decision in the apostolic period resulted from persistent prayer. *"They gathered frequently to pray as a group..."* (Acts 1:14). The replacement of Judas resulted from prayer. The whole life and vitality of the early Church resulted from this watchfulness in prayer.

Of course, the apostles were only practicing what Jesus modeled for them, He frequently spent whole nights in prayer. For example, the choosing of the twelve apostles followed such a night. And He directed these men to persist in their prayer.

Luke 11:5-13, *"And He said to them, 'Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; And he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you' I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. 'So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'"*

And then in Luke 18:1-8, *"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, Saying: 'There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, Yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' " Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day*

and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

The apostles finally grew to a point in spiritual maturity where they realized that they needed to do as Jesus had done. They confessed their need to spend, "...full time in prayer and the work of teaching" (Acts 6:4). That is when deacons were appointed to take over some practical chores. When do we see ourselves persevering in prayer – steadfast, unwavering, single-minded, and unremitting?

Are we so more modern? You know – rip open the corner, dump the contents into a cup, nuke it until water boils, and stir – quick and easy. If it takes longer than 20 seconds, we're not around to find out. Is our patience so thin, and our faith so superficial, that we give up so easily in spiritual warfare? We run up our white flags of defeat so that we can return to our comfortable, pagan lifestyle of relying on our own power to accomplish what we want.

When our church's financial support is inadequate. When Satan attacks with doubts about whether we will be able to pay our bills. When our family life appears to go sour. When our employment begins to look temporary. When our confidence in Christ plummets. What do we do? Do we persevere in prayer? OR do we just fall apart, never turning to the One, the only One, that can sustain our very need and trouble?

A passage, which helps me when these situations come up, is found in Romans 5:3-5, *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; And perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

A diagram of these verses would look like this:

TROUBLES $\frac{3}{4}\frac{3}{4}\textcircled{\text{R}}$ ENDURANCE $\frac{3}{4}\frac{3}{4}\textcircled{\text{R}}$ GOD'S APPROVAL $\frac{3}{4}\frac{3}{4}\textcircled{\text{R}}$ HOPE

Without endurance and perseverance, we never experience God's approval. Consequently, we have no hope, no vision, and no optimism. We're defeated easily. When we can learn to

greet troubles as a means of building our endurance by prayerfully relying on the Lord's sufficiency, we'll be dangerous! Satan won't be able to stop us!

When I look for a person to share in the leadership on the flock, I choose someone who is learning this principle. When we've learned to endure in prayer, the Lord will count us as worthy to give us greater responsibility. The Lord places his mantle of blessing only on those Leaders who learn how to use troubles to build their endurance rather than copping out when the going gets rough.

As a youth, Jacob was obnoxious, pretentious, and selfish. But lurking beneath that conceited exterior was a longing for God's blessing which his brother, Esau, took for granted. Sure, Jacob received the blessing through deceit, but over the years, his methods were being changed from brash to gentle. Finally, the Lord broke Jacob's strong-willed self-reliance. Consequently, Jacob prayed in Genesis 32:9-12, *"...God of my grandfather Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude'."*

Jacob's heart was so changed that he spent much of the night in persevering prayer. Later, he sent all of his family and huge herds across a river, *"...but he stayed behind, alone."*

Genesis 32:24-30, *"Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him., And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!' So He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked, saying, 'Tell me Your name, I pray.' And He said, 'Why is it that you ask about My name?' And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.'" Because of Jacob's perseverance, God's blessing was passed to him.*

I'm beginning to discover this principle in my own life. My longing has been to be used by the Lord to disciple men and women in a radical commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. Early in my ministry, my motives were self-serving. The Lord had to break me as He did Jacob. He has used insults, financial deprivation, long periods of tears and prayers, up-rooting from friends and family, and my own sin to call me up short, to get my attention, to break me so that He could mold me.

Now my joy is boundless as I see your lives growing in Christ, as I see the Barnabas men growing ever more serious in their relationship in Christ. Because of the enduring in Christ, God's approval is blessing me, and longing is being fulfilled. But the Lord used ten years of trouble to give me this endurance. It has been painful; terrible at times. But I would join Jacob, in wrestling all night if I had to, to receive God's blessing. By contrast, there is nothing that can compare to it.

Sometimes, we may persevere in prayer, but we don't recognize God's answer when it occurs. There was a man who told how he was once lost in a forest. His Christian friend asked, "Well, did you pray about it?" "Yes, I really did a long time," the man answered. "Did God ever answer your prayer?" his friend asked. "He didn't have a chance. A guy came and led me out of the forest."

3. **OUR PRAYER IS TO BE UNSELFISH:** *"...pray always for all God's people."* We are to be aware of other Christian's needs and pray for them. We are to pray that their eyes will be open to the pitfalls of their choices. That they won't be deceived by the seeming attractiveness of prestige, power, and possessions into which the devil tries to lure them.

An inherent part of helping to *"...carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ"*(Galatians 6:2) is to pray for each other. We may not be rich, but we can pray for each other's financial needs. We may not have a word of wisdom, which will turn a person's head in the right direction, but we can pray for him or her.

For example, a woman asked me if she should go to a man and encourage him to free his wife from a particular responsibility. My counsel was for her to pray, to help carry their burden through prayer, and to rely on the Holy Spirit to work in the couple's hearts. Within two days, the Lord gave the wife peace in her heart and the couple moved forward in

mutual confidence. Why? Because their Christian sister had unselfishly helped to bear their burden through persevering prayer.

Lack of forgiveness is one of the selfish barriers to our prayer life. As Ros Rinker wrote in Prayer: Conversing with God, "...unforgiveness or resentment toward another can hinder our prayers. Unforgiveness on our part automatically creates guilt in us. If I cannot love my brother whom I can see, how can I love God, whom I cannot see? (1 John 4:20) Love of God and love of fellowman go together. **I will love God only as much as I love the person I dislike the most.** If I am blinded by an unforgiving spirit toward my brother, how can I see God? There is blessedness for the pure in heart, for they see God. Lack of forgiveness is the equivalent of an impure heart. Resentment and unforgiveness are the roots of many diseases from which people suffer intensely. Only God can heal an unforgiving heart."

Remember the first, major point of this whole passage in verse 12? We're NOT each other's enemies. Do not strive against each other. Instead, realize that we share in a common enemy, the Devil.

The reason why that person acts so terribly towards us is because he is under a heavy, unrelenting attack by our common enemy. Perhaps he doesn't know how to use God's armor to defend himself. Perhaps he is forgetting to "10:5" (2 Cor.) his thoughts. Perhaps he is torn up inside with unforgiven guilt and needs to be set free by Christ.

So how am I going to respond, unselfishly, by praying for him? By realizing that his great spiritual warfare is causing his terrible behavior toward me? By empathizing with the pain within him? By stepping outside of my own feelings and stepping into his disintegrated life with prayer?

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY QUESTIONS

WEEK SIX

Do All This In Prayer

- Read Do All This In Prayer, and be prepared to discuss:
 1. Why is it important that I think through the implications of the armor of God, and then pray?
 2. How does this process affect my focus in prayer?
 3. According to **Philippians 4:6-7**, for what things am I allowed to be anxious? What specifically are current areas of potential anxiety in my life? How can I pray and give these things over to God?

6. How has this study changed/provoked/challenged me in my prayer life?