

THE ARMOR OF GOD

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PREFACE TO 2002 EDITION

This book is an adaptation of a series of short sermons that I had delivered on the radio. While preparing them for print, I had taken the liberty to revise and improve them. Significant changes were made in some cases, and they have also been greatly abridged. Although many had expressed their appreciation for the original version of these sermons, I am convinced that they are now even more accurate and helpful than before.

This series of sermons comes under the title of *The Armor of God*, and consists of an exposition and application of the corresponding passage in Ephesians 6. Contrary to some popular notion, the armor that God has given us is not a system of weaponry carrying mystical power that we may use against the enemy. Rather, each piece of armor refers to the content of a specific area of the Christian faith and its reality in our lives. This series explores these areas of biblical truths that make up our defensive and offensive weapons.

Although brief and simple, the messages that follow take the word of God seriously, and will challenge the reader to live for our Lord Jesus Christ more passionately, intelligently, and confidently.

1. THE POWER OF GOD

In Ephesians 6:10-17, the apostle Paul writes, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul discusses many issues such as predestination, the power of God exercised in redemption, our place in Christ, the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians in Christ, spiritual maturity, speech and conduct, parents and children, marriage, and so on.

When it comes time to conclude his letter, Paul reaches out for the attention of his readers, and desires to leave them with a final thought, namely, to put on "the full armor of God." He then proceeds to explain the parts that constitute this armor. As it turns out, the *full* armor of God is indeed complete, consisting of all that the Christian needs to "take [his] stand against the devil's schemes."

We will begin our exposition of this passage from verse 10, where Paul says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

Here, the apostle admonishes the reader to "be strong," yet that is to be done "in the Lord." In other words, the strength of the Christian is derived from God, and none of us are strong apart from his "mighty power."

Previously in the letter, Paul discusses the type of power God had made available to us in Christ. He reveals to us that the same power God exercised to raise Jesus Christ from the dead is being wielded for our benefit: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ

when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:18-20).

It seems that the issue is not to gain this power, through prayer or other means, but that our understanding needs to "be enlightened" so that we may know "his incomparably great power for us who believe...which he exerted in Christ" in his resurrection and enthronement.

It should be settled, then, that the power God has made available to us is more than sufficient. In fact, it is through "his power that is at work within us" that God will "do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). We can have confidence to face pressure and adverse circumstances, knowing that God has put into us a kind of power so strong that it could raise Jesus from the dead. And this power has been given to every person who is in Christ.

This piece of information may come as a surprise to some Christians, especially for those whose lives are characterized by defeat and barrenness. Although God's power is available to every Christian, it remains dormant in some due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. This is precisely what the apostle seeks to remedy by asking that God will enlighten the Christians' minds, so that they may realize what has been made available to them.

So, Paul says to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," not by requesting additional power from God, but by understanding his provisions given to us in Christ. Pray then, for understanding.

When a Christian comes to the realization that God's power has been placed in him through Christ, he ceases to be afraid of what the devil is trying to do in his life. He is no longer fearful of other people. He remembers that the Scripture says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

The apostle John says in 1 John 4:4, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them." Who is he referring to when he says, "them"? He is talking about evil spirits – the spirits that inspire "false prophets," and even the "spirit of the antichrist" (v. 3). And the reason why we "have overcome them" is "because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (v. 4).

Who is "the one who is in you"? Paul says that God has chosen to "make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). And the apostle John explains, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God" (1 John 4:15). The Bible even tells us that we are "God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in [us]" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

When Paul instructs us to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," he is telling us to depend on and be strengthened by the greatest power in the universe, one by which

God creates, sustains, and subdues all things. A realization of this fact should exclude fear and defeat from the Christian's life.

After all, "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). Everyone of us can overcome the world when we believe and depend on God's power. God's elect are destined for victory (Romans 8:37).

2. THE DECEPTION OF SATAN

In the previous chapter, we began our discussion of Ephesians 6:10-11 with a brief exposition of verse 10, where Paul says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." From this verse we mentioned that the Scripture teaches us to rely on the "mighty power" that God has already made available to us. If we will just understand that God has placed his power in us, then we will experience victory in life. As the Bible says, "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Proceeding to the next verse in the passage, we read, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (v. 11). The word translated "schemes" here (Greek: *methodeia*) refers to trickery or deceit – deception is the "method" by which Satan seeks to defeat the believer. It is through putting on "the full armor of God" that we will be able to "stand against" the devil.

Christians need to be aware that the devil desires to trick them in different areas of their lives through various methods. Peter warns: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Peter is telling his readers to stay awake – "be self-controlled and alert." There is an enemy who desires to destroy us, and he is identified as the devil. Although he "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour," we can "resist him" and remain immovable in our stance of faith.

The apostle John assures us that, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him" (1 John 5:18).

In any case, God instructs us to be prepared. We must realize that deception is Satan's weapon. He will lie to us, and attempt to bombard us with unbiblical thoughts and anti-Christian arguments, and those who fail to "escape from the trap of the devil" are "taken...captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26). On the other hand, Jesus says that, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

In fact, only those who belong to Christ are truly free. The rest of the world "is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). This is because only Christians possess and assent to truth, and they are able to see reality as it is. As for non-Christians, Paul says, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Those who reject the gospel are denying reality, and are blinded by Satan.

Obviously, Satan does not want people to understand and assent to the good news that we preach; therefore, he blinds the minds of unbelievers and prevent them from believing the Gospel. The mind is where the battle is fought. Even after your have become a Christian, the devil will try to continue attacking your mind with lies, and thus to undermine your faith in Christ.

Jesus provides us with some valuable insight into the devil's nature when he says to the Pharisees, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). When the devil tells a lie, he is doing so out of his own nature. Lying is natural to the devil. So, the devil attacks by speaking, whether through other human beings or not, into a person's mind. Whatever he says is false, and when believed, will lead one away from God.

Knowing this should cause us to take Paul's words seriously when he says, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). That is, the weapons that God has given to us have "divine power to demolish strongholds," which are in fact "arguments" that are "against the knowledge of God." So, we fight to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." This is how spiritual warfare is done, and it is for this purpose that the "full armor of God" has been given to us.

Moving on to Ephesians 6:12, Paul writes, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Our fight is not natural, but spiritual.

There are many people who have been attacked by adverse circumstances, and when they attempt to fight in the natural, the problems either remain, or they keep on returning. They just cannot seem to be loose from the problems. The reason is that they are not attacking the problems at their roots, but they are merely fighting the superficial manifestations of them.

We must understand that demonic forces are real. Failure to recognize their existence and activities does not grant one exemption from their attacks, but merely prevents one from resisting them. But when the Bible shows us, as it clearly does, that our fight is in the spiritual realm, and not with flesh and blood, then it is toward this area where we must concentrate our efforts.

However, this is not to say that a spiritual fight is a mystical one – one which consists of invisible swords, shields, and arrows. By saying that we have weapons with "divine power," Paul refers to the God-given ability to "demolish arguments and every pretension

that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Let us not think, as some tend to do, that by "spiritual" we are referring to the mystical rather than to the intellectual. The same applies to our understanding of the armor of God described in Ephesians 6.

Rather than fighting against the symptoms, if we will learn to direct God's weapons of "divine power" against the root of the problem, then we will have truly destroyed the devil's strongholds. This introductory exposition of Ephesians 6:10-17 is designed to train the reader on doing precise this.

Recall how in the previous chapter, we mentioned that God has placed in you the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It is this same power that energizes our Christian work: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29).

How can Satan possibly withstand this kind of power? Indeed, he cannot. This is why when we "put on the full armor of God," we will be able to "stand against the devil's schemes." This is also why the apostle James can assure his readers, saying, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

3. THE STAND OF FAITH

Ephesians 6:11 instructs us to "put on the full armor of God," that is, we must take up every piece of weapon that God has given us and not neglect any one. Having done so, we will be prepared to "stand against the devil's schemes."

Verse 12 then further informs us, saying that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood," but "against the spiritual forces of evil." We must recognize the reality of demonic powers, that evil spirits are real. These intelligent beings wield their deceptive powers to blind men and women from the truth of God's word. It is through the power of God the Holy Spirit that we are enlightened concerning the truth and are thus enabled to assent to it. As the apostle Paul explains, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Holy Spirit removes our spiritual blindness, after which God transmits his truths to our minds through the Scripture. Jesus prayed to God for his disciples, saying, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). So, not only does our initial enlightenment concerning the things of God come from the Scripture, but all subsequent spiritual growth comes through knowledge of the same, and this is the basis of our progressive sanctification.

In connection with this, Paul writes to his readers, saying, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). It is important to learn that we are "renewed in knowledge" (Colossians 3:10), and not through mystical experiences, or even just through prayer. It is only when we understand and retain biblical truths in our minds that we may live our lives in obedience to God and to successfully resist the devil when he comes against us.

Matthew 16:21-23 serves to illustrate something else that we must learn: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'"

In other words, when Jesus predicted to his disciples his impending death and subsequent resurrection, Peter protested and said that it would never happen. Whatever his intention for saying this, Peter was contradicting the plan of God in his thought and speech. But when Jesus replied, he spoke against Satan, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Here, Jesus saw through the surface of the issue and discerned the root, or the origin of the thought that resulted in Peter's words, and corrected it with his rebuke. Likewise, the Bible says to us, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Let us turn to another passage that illustrates a different type of problem: "While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel'" (Matthew 9:32-33).

The passage shows that what is apparently a physical disability may have its origin in demonic activities. In another place, Peter points out that those whom Jesus had healed were "under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38). What we need to do is to attack the problem at its roots: "And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke." More than a few of us fail to realize that many of the problems we face are due to demonic activities. Often, Christians do not take the devil seriously in that they fail to discern the evil origin of anti-Christian thoughts, speech, circumstances, doctrines, and cultural trends.

Paul continues in Ephesians 6:13, "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

Not only does the full armor of God protect us from the "devil's schemes," but it enables us to stand firm "when the day of evil comes." That is, when every piece of armor that God has provided for us is intact in our spiritual life, then we can face the enemy in hand-to-hand combat with confidence.

The Bible says that some "were broken off because of unbelief," but we "stand by faith" (Romans 11:20). It is "by faith" that we are able to "stand firm" (2 Corinthians 1:24).

The Christian walk, from the very beginning, is one of faith. We are "justified through faith," and therefore "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (Romans 5:1-2).

Through faith, we have been justified, or declared righteousness, by God. But our faith does not end here, and Paul says it would be foolish to think otherwise: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?...Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (Galatians 3:3, 5). Not only have we been justified by faith, but through faith, God's power continues to be at work in our lives.

4. THE BELT OF TRUTH

Before moving on to Ephesians 6:14, let us quickly summarize what has been discussed so far. Paul says in Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." God has put into us his divine power, and we must seek to gain understanding concerning this fact so that it may become effective in our lives. As Ephesians 3:20 says, God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

Having instructed us to rely on God's power, Paul then tells us to "put on the full armor of God," through which we will be able to "stand against the devil's schemes" (v. 11). Although the devil's ability to deceive is considerable, God has given us weapons with "divine power" (2 Corinthians 10:4) so that we may destroy the anti-Christian arguments and thoughts that Satan uses to attack us.

Paul reminds us that our fight is "not against flesh and blood," but "against the spiritual forces of evil" (v. 12). So, we should aim to attack the root cause of the problems we face, and not merely try to overcome the symptoms. Having "put on the full armor of God," we are prepared to stand our ground "when the day of evil comes" (v. 13).

We are almost ready to study the pieces of weapons that constitute the full armor of God. Before that, we need to explain two important points regarding them, namely, the nature of the weapons and the possible implications of having each weapon correspond to a representative part of the human body.

Paul likens the armor that God has given us to the armor used by Romans soldiers at that time. Of course, the difference is that our weapons are not material, but spiritual. However, they are not spiritual in the sense of being mystical, but each piece of weapon represents a set of biblical truths that protects a given area of our Christian walk.

For example, it may be correct for us to say that when Paul says that salvation is as a helmet, it means that the biblical truths concerning salvation is meant to protect our "head," or our mind. Or, when righteousness is likened to a breastplate, perhaps it means that our understanding of justification and the righteousness of Christ serves to guard our conscience against the devil's accusations.

This is certainly a possible way of interpretation. But even if the apostle had not meant for the identification of each doctrine with a particular piece of armor to be taken to such an extent in our understanding, our point is intact – that is, each piece of weapon corresponds to a set of biblical propositions, or a doctrine, that we must learn in order to successfully wage war against the devil. And since doctrinal truth is something we comprehend with our mind as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the intellectual nature of each piece of weapon cannot be denied or ignored.

The relevance of all this is that when we "put on" the full armor of God, we do not do it through imagining ourselves dressed in a mystical armor with an appearance resembling that of a Roman soldier, nor do we exercise the power in these weapons through physical motion. Rather, our weapons have "divine power" to "demolish *arguments*...and [to] take captive every *thought* to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Such is the nature of the battle and the weapons.

Thus, we will interpret Paul's identification of each spiritual weapon to a corresponding piece of armor of the Roman soldier as meaningful in the sense that salvation is a helmet for a reason, namely, to protect the mind, as a physical helmet guards the head. From this perspective, comparing truth with the role of the belt in a Roman soldier's armor is also quite appropriate. However, the preceding paragraphs explain that even if this carries Paul's analogy too far, as long as we keep in mind that these are spiritual (intellectual) weapons given us to fight intellectual arguments from the devil, we are operating within the boundaries of the text. Nevertheless, in a more thorough exposition of this passage on the armor of God, this issue must be dealt with more meticulously, and an unambiguous resolution should be reached.

With the above in mind, we now come to verse 14, where Paul mentions two pieces of armor: "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place." We will discuss the "belt of truth" in this chapter, and reserve the "breastplate of righteousness" for the next.

Truth, Paul says, is as a belt, where, in the Roman soldier's armor, holds the rest of the items in place. Likewise, truth is what holds everything together in our Christian walk, and therefore is paramount.

Without the truth given to us by God, there would be no righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation for us to "put on." And certainly, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, would be non-existent, since God's word *is* truth.

Now, what do we mean by truth? For our purpose, a sufficient definition would be that truth refers to *what is true*, which in turn refers to the real state of affairs, or the way things really are. A *true* statement, then, would be one that corresponds to reality and one that communicates the actual state of affairs. Christian growth can only occur as one learns to recognize that which is true and identify that which is false. You must believe, or give assent, only to the truth.

Jesus says in John 8:31-32, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." You will only know the truth if you "hold to" the "teaching" (Greek: *logos*; word, reasoning, doctrine) of Jesus.

Contrary to the opinion of many, the strength of a Christian rests not on experience, prayer, or fellowship with other believers, but on truth – that is the doctrine of Christ as conveyed through the Scripture. Without truth, the other weapons such as righteousness,

faith, and salvation, remain undefined, and thus can hardly be "put on." A Christian's priority, then, must be to gain knowledge of truth. And since God reveals truth to us through the Scripture, the Bible is where we should look to and to which we must give preeminence.

Jesus says "the truth will set you free" when you have come to know it. If the deception of the devil keeps one bound, then naturally the truth of God's word will liberate and release one from bondage.

For example, many are deceived on the matter of sin. They think that human beings are essentially good, and that as long as one does not commit (what they perceive to be) anything particularly wicked, one is not a sinner, and is acceptable in God's sight. What a dangerous thing this is to believe! The Bible shows us that we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and that the human "heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9). Even our "righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), which are unable to satisfy God's requirements. But the Bible also shows us the truth on how to gain salvation; that is, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Another area in which Satan desires to deceive us concerns the present blessings and benefits God gives to his people. To illustrate, although the Bible says that it is God's nature to heal our physical bodies (Exodus 15:26), and that it explicitly commands us to "forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:2-3), there are those who teach that God does not heal, or no longer heals, by means of his miraculous power. That is, the gift of healing is no longer in operation today. But given no biblical evidence in support of this view, we must consider it a lie from Satan with the purpose of robbing us of our health and an effective evangelistic tool.

In the area of finances, Satan would have us believe that the Christian life is not one of wealth and prosperity, and some even hold that faith and material abundance are mutually exclusive. With such erroneous beliefs, the Christian is less likely to have sufficient funds with which to finance evangelistic projects and to produce quality doctrinal teaching materials.

While it is true that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15), the Christian is certainly not doomed to poverty, or forbidden to be rich. Rather, the Bible teaches that, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9), and assures us that, "God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phillippians 4:19).

The more truth we learn and commit ourselves to, the more we become immune to the devil's deception, and the more freedom we will begin to enjoy. While Satan is the "father of lies," Jesus has given to us the Holy Spirit, whom he calls the spirit of truth: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his

own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13).

1 Corinthians 2:12 further explains that, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." While the devil will lie to us and blind us to the provisions made available to us through Christ, God has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that "we may understand what God has freely given us." As the apostle Peter says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

God has already given us "everything we need for life," but it is "through *our knowledge* of him" that we will have access to his provisions. Such knowledge is conveyed to us, again, through the Scripture. And it is God, by his Spirit, who grants us understanding and assent to such knowledge.

A particularly destructive lie that the devil has effectively used against Christians is that the spiritual is irrational and that the intellectual is unspiritual – spirituality and rationality are mutually exclusive. Accepting this falsehood has resulted in anti-intellectualism among Christians. And since our divine weapons were given to us precisely to "demolish *arguments*" and to "take captive every *thought*," to abandon the role of the mind in religion does not mean that we have become more spiritual, but it only means that we have stopped resisting the devil altogether, having discarded our divine weapons, and thus have in fact become less spiritual.

5. THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

We have seen that, in spiritual warfare, we must rely on God's power and not our own (Ephesians 6:10). When we have put on the full armor of God, we will be able to stand against Satan's attacks (v. 11). This is crucial since our fight is not against material things or natural beings, but "the spiritual forces of evil," which are the root cause for many of the problems and anti-Christian ideas we face (v. 12). We must, therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that we may stand our ground "when the day of evil comes" (v. 13). And we begin by securing the belt of truth (v. 14), which is what holds other pieces of weapons together in the Christian armor. The Scripture, or the word of God, is truth. So, to have truth firmly in place in our lives, we must learn it from the Bible.

Next, the apostle Paul mentions the breastplate of righteousness: "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place" (Ephesians 6:14).

James 5:16 says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." In other words, the prayer uttered by a righteous person has much power. Often, when Christians read this verse or others like it, they are driven to despair instead of faith and encouragement. They think that since they are not righteous, God will not answer their prayers. And of course, they have committed many sins even after they have become Christians, and so it seems that they cannot be righteous.

This is one reason why you need the breastplate of righteousness to protect your heart. Satan will attempt to use condemnation to attack your conscience, and thereby immobilizing your spiritual progress and ministry. But an understanding of righteousness will protect you from his accusations and lies.

The apostle John writes, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:21-22).

Surely, the devil does not want this to happen – he does not want you to "have confidence before God." So, he uses condemnation and guilt to attack your heart. But the "breastplate of righteousness" protects you; that is, when you understand what righteousness means, then you will become immune to Satan's accusations.

What we need to know about righteousness is that we can never attain it through our own good works, but it must be imputed to us by God. Paul explains that righteousness is a gift (Romans 5:17) that God grants to his elect through faith: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The Bible teaches that "a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28). Jesus had committed no sin, but "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6), so that "whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

However, if you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord, then you are not righteous: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

So, if you are a Christian, James 5:16 applies to you: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." The Scripture invites us to "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience" (Hebrews 10:22). The Christian is a righteous person, not due to his own good works, but he is justified by God through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That being so, we should not listen to the devil's accusations. He seeks to undermine our confidence so that we may not approach God and receive answers to our prayers.

However, even Christians at times commit sins, and thus incur a guilty conscience. Although no sin is excusable, God, who "knows how we are formed" and who "remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14), have mercy on us and have provided us an Advocate, so that "if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). That is, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Of course, this is not to say that once you have become a Christian, you can sin all you want with immunity, since no genuine Christian will do that: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). As the apostle Paul says in Romans 6:1-2, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Those who go around sinning all they want, and do not even have a guilty conscience concerning their behavior, saying all the while that "God's grace covers it all," are not even saved. Many Christians may be spiritually weak, and even the stronger ones at times struggle with temptations, but no Christian deliberately makes a practice of sin. Those who love God will obey his word: "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

What the Bible says concerning justification, when properly understood, forms a breastplate to protect your sense of righteousness. It guards your mind when the devil attempts to bombard you with accusations over past sins. Let no sin remained unconfessed in your life, and the devil will have no basis from which to condemn you. Satan desires to steal your confidence, so that you will draw back from approaching God

to present your requests and intercessions. But this cannot happen when the breastplate of righteousness is held firmly in place by the belt of truth, just as the belt of the Roman soldier held his breastplate in place.

6. THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

After the breastplate of righteousness, Paul says that in putting on the armor of God, we should have our "feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15).

Certain passages in the Bible use the feet as figurative of our daily conduct, although it also carries numerous other related meanings, depending on the context of the passage. The relevant imagery of walking at times also contains the meaning of our daily conduct, such as when Paul says that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7, KJV; thus, NIV: "*live* by faith").

Therefore, when Paul says that the "gospel of peace" (or "the readiness that comes from" it) is as foot gear for our Christian walk, it is telling us that the content of the gospel must not only be a topic of discussion limited to church activities, but that it must be an integral part of our daily conduct. Since it is referred to as part of our armor, we must also understand this to mean that the gospel is the means, or weapon, by which we will advance the kingdom of God.

It is not through youth programs, charity, music, or even prayer that we will conquer the enemy's territory. But it is through preaching and other ways of publishing the actual *content* of the gospel, such as the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and their implications that we will destroy the strongholds that Satan has built into our audience's minds.

Our gospel is a gospel of *peace*, but this peace is certainly not to be had with the enemies of God, but with the Father, the Son, and other Christians. As the apostle John says, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

This gospel does not make us automatically peaceful with the rest of the world, but it gives us peaceful fellowship with God. Only when we conquer enemy territory with this gospel will others be able to join us in fellowship. Thus, Paul says in Romans 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

Paul says that we are to have the *readiness* that comes from the gospel of peace, meaning that we are not just to know the content of the gospel for ourselves, but we must be prepared to articulate the same to others. The apostle Peter also instructs us to do this, saying, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

Always be ready to use the gospel to destroy the strongholds that Satan has installed in the minds of others. Never be caught short on the arguments, creativity, and biblical

knowledge that you will need to persuasively address the non-Christian. Peter is saying that you should be prepared to answer anyone who asks you questions concerning Christianity. You should be able to tell them, with precision and sound reason, what you believe and why you believe it. We should be "prepared in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2).

The biblical mandate to the Christian is that he should "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). This is not an option. Jesus commands his disciples to preach the gospel to "all the world." This is how we will destroy the works of Satan.

Paul says that he is "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). The gospel is the "power of God," through which God will accomplish his purposes on earth. And God has made us his representatives, so that we may publish his commands to the nations: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

We will not be "ashamed of the gospel," or embarrassed by its contents and claims, if we have it settled in our minds that it is "the power of God." We will not be embarrassed if we realize, as it is in fact, that Christianity is superior to all other belief systems, and that it is the only one that flawlessly represents God, his nature and commands, and other aspects of reality. Once we are convinced of this and have learned how to articulate it to others, then we will have attained "the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

The gospel is indeed good news to God's elect, and it brings the believer to a place of having peace with God and his people. It is the "fragrance of life" to those who accept it, but as it is a piece of weapon against the enemy, it also carries the "smell of death" to those who reject its claims to truth and on their lives (2 Corinthians 2:16). Thus, the one who preaches the gospel rightly brings the power of God to save those who will believe, and at the same time, brings destruction and condemnation to those who will not. The one who preaches the gospel is God's messenger, releasing his power to save and to destroy, to justify and to condemn.

However, contrary to many, I do not limit "preaching the gospel" to what is usually called "evangelism." Rather, I contend that the teaching ministry, that is, providing biblical instructions to the Christians, takes precedence over evangelism in a gospel ministry.

This may sound strange to many people who are used to hearing that evangelism is the top priority of the church. This misleading view has caused many to neglect the funding of, and other ways of participating in, the theological and biblical training of believers. As a result, there are many Christians who are feeble in intellect, ignorant regarding biblical doctrines, and incompetent in defending Christianity. After all, without extensive training by the church and other institutions (such as the family), how many Christians

will attain the "readiness" described above? And how can one properly preach the gospel without even having an elementary understanding of its contents?

No Christian will doubt the evangelistic zeal of the apostle Paul, but he describes his own ministry as one that proclaims Christ, "*admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ*" (Colossians 1:28). Paul says that he is "struggling with all his (God's) energy, which so powerfully works in me" (v. 29) so that he may, not get people to accept Christ, but beyond that to "present everyone perfect" in him. He says that it is "to this end" (v. 29) that he labors. This passage mentions both evangelism and teaching, with presenting "everyone perfect in Christ," or the Christian's maturity, as the intended goal for both.

To quote the passage without interruption, it says, "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:27-29).

Verse 27 obviously refers to evangelism, since Paul refers to his making "known among the Gentiles" the message of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The word translated "admonishing" (Greek: *nouthetountes*) in verse 28 may also refer to evangelism. Professor Curtis Vaughan explains that this word here "relates to non-Christians, the thought probably being that the apostle sought to awaken each of them to his need of Christ. Some interpreters think the word corresponds to the demand for repentance in the Gospels" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978; p. 193). The word "teaching" (Greek: *didaskontes*) refers to the teaching ministry, and "stresses the importance of instruction in proclaiming the Word" (Ibid., p. 193). Vaughan also agrees that the word translated "perfect" in this verse refers "to maturity in faith and character" (Ibid., p. 193).

So, both evangelism and teaching serve the ultimate end of producing mature Christians to be presented to Christ. This should be the priority of the church. But evangelism ends once a person accepts Christ, while a Christian requires lifelong instructions. It is reasonable, then, to place greater emphasis on teaching than on evangelism, although both are undoubtedly important.

To repeat, the purpose of ministry is to produce mature Christians, an end which is best served by the teaching ministry. But for teaching to be meaningful, the audience must first be converted, and thus evangelism. In other words, evangelism is only a short-term means to a long-term end (teaching), which is in turn a means to another end (maturity). Therefore, to view evangelism as the greatest task of the church is to distort the nature of Christian ministry, and as it is often the case nowadays, the appropriate end (Christian maturity) is never reached or even considered.

In what is commonly called the "Great Commission," a passage often used to encourage evangelism, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

If Jesus intends only to command evangelism, why does this mandate he is giving us include "teaching" the people of the nations? And if only evangelism is intended, certainly it would be unnecessary to teach the non-Christians to "obey everything" that the Lord has commanded. Do you recite every command in the Scripture before you believe that the non-Christian has enough information to accept Christ? Certainly not. So, Jesus has the teaching ministry in mind in this passage – he says that "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" is an essential part of the Great Commission.

Even if we understand the words, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," as only referring to evangelism, we must admit that the latter part, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you," as referring to the teaching ministry, with the former (evangelism) leading to the latter (teaching).

Evangelism is only a means to produce converts, *so that* we may teach them to obey all the commands of Christ. Those who uplift evangelism at the expense of the teaching ministry defies the very command of Christ that they claim to be carrying out.

To summarize, the Bible says that the purpose of ministry is to produce mature Christians. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:12-14, Christian ministers are chosen by Christ "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants...blown here and there by every wind of teaching..."

Of course, to become mature in Christ, one must first be in Christ, and thus the reason for evangelism. This also means that evangelism is not the end purpose of Christian ministry, but the means by which we may call God's elect into union with Christ, and through the process of sanctification, to become mature in him.

Evangelism, therefore, is not a greater ministry or responsibility than the teaching ministry, but it serves as a way to bring people into the teaching ministry. And even evangelism itself is dependent on the prior doctrinal training of, or the teaching ministry received by, the evangelist.

To possess "the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace," therefore, must mean more than having just enough comprehension of the gospel to tell another how to accept Christ, but it refers to a ready knowledge of the whole Christian message. Otherwise, any Christian, since he has already learned enough to accept Christ, would be sufficiently prepared, and no one would need to deliberately obtain such "readiness" as the apostle Paul wants us to possess. In other words, not every Christian is automatically "ready," and this is a defect only the teaching ministry can remedy. Any "evangelistic" ministry

that does not also provide comprehensive Christian teaching, or at least refers their converts to such, is at best incomplete.

7. THE SHIELD OF FAITH

We have now come to Ephesians 6:16 in our study, where Paul mentions the shield of faith: "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

The word translated "shield" (Greek: *thyreon*) "is derived from *thyra* (a door) and refers to the large oblong or oval *scutum* the Roman soldier held in front of him for protection. It consisted of two layers of wood glued together, covered with linen and hide, and bound with iron. Soldiers often fought side by side with a solid wall (*testudo*) of shields. But even a single-handed combatant found himself sufficiently protected...For the Christian this protective shield is faith (*pistis*)" (*Expositor's*, Vol. 11; p. 88).

A relevant question is whether the "faith" here is the subjective belief of the individual or the objective content of the Christian faith. On this point, I am in general agreement with Professor A. Skevington Wood, who says that in this verse, "believing cannot be divorced from what is believed, and no rigid line should be drawn between these two aspects" (*Ibid.*, p. 88).

But perhaps we can be more precise than this. If, as established previously, each piece of armor refers to the biblical truths corresponding to it, then the individual weapons in themselves should represent the objective content of the Christian faith. That is, the belt of truth refers to truth itself, and not the Christian's commitment to it. Likewise, the breastplate of righteousness represents the biblical doctrine on the subject, but does not by itself imply the individual's subjective realization of it.

The point of the passage we are studying is that the Christian must "*put on* the full armor of God" – to personally take possession and identify with the biblical truths represented by these pieces of weapons. Truth is truth by itself, whether one commits to it or not; however, it will not benefit the one who has not put it on to structure the entirety of his thoughts and actions. The content of the gospel remains the same even if the Christian only comprehends a small fraction of it, but when he puts it on through intensive study and training, and allows the gospel to govern his daily conduct, he becomes one who is prepared to advance the kingdom of God. Likewise, the shield of faith may very well represent the objective content of the Christian faith (its various doctrines), but it will only protect the one who picks it up and puts it before him.

Considering the Ephesians' historical situation, I agree with Professor Wood that the "[the flaming arrows of the evil one] are likely to have been deliberate attempts to destroy the unity of Christ's body (3:14-22; 4:1-16, 27) through the invasion of false doctrine..." (*Ibid.*, p. 86). Paul instructs the Phillippians to be "of the same mind" (Phillippians 2:2, NASB) and they should "with one mind" be "striving together for the faith of the gospel" (1:27, NASB). A church can hardly be "of the same mind" if its members cannot agree on

the content of the gospel. The situation becomes even worse when, due to their neglecting the shield of faith, false doctrine takes over the minds of some.

False doctrine is indeed as "flaming arrows," with destructive effects that spread rapidly. But the shield of faith can "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." And if the content of the Scripture is the shield of faith, then picking it up and holding it before us would mean to learn and apply the Scripture. Those who know biblical doctrines with precision and confidently believe in them are able to resist the false ideas that Satan sends their way.

Although the taking up of this weapon requires strength and discipline, its use is often remarkably simple: "Although Paul does not give individual examples of these flaming arrows, Hodge mentions horrible, blasphemous, skeptical thoughts and more subtle suggestions of cupidity, discontent, and vanity. These, or whatever else the figure of speech may represent, are to be extinguished by faith. Evil thoughts must be dislodged and expelled by good thoughts. If in trouble we doubt either the power or the wisdom of God, we should say to ourselves, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty,' or repeat some verse that speaks of his loving kindness. Thus the doctrines of faith will expel our false ideas" (Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians*; Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1985; p. 208).

Realizing that the shield of faith and the flaming arrows are mental and doctrinal in nature produces certain implications, namely, "We must have already studied and memorized some Scripture in order to have something to remember. This study is like picking up the shield in the first place" (Ibid., p. 208). In other words, one who is ignorant of Scripture and doctrine has not yet picked up the shield of faith – he has little protection against the flaming arrows, or false ideas, of Satan and the world. And once a member of the church has been "injured" by false doctrine, the damage may spread rather quickly if left unchecked, for "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9). It is important for Christian leaders to properly train their people, so that everyone may be skilled at using the shield of faith (Hebrews 5:13-14; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Thus, picking up the shield of faith is not only a matter of will, but one of understanding and will. Not only is the volition involved, but also the intellect. The understanding of biblical doctrine is prior to volitional assent and commitment to the same, since the will cannot commit to something that is not there. If the shield of faith represents the objective content of Scripture, then the intellectual comprehension of and volitional commitment to the same is as the act of picking it up.

The large size of the shield is also meaningful, since the knowledge of the Scripture in one area may not always protect one from the attacks of false ideas on another topic. Confidence in one subject may not always grant one immunity from doubt on another. So, a comprehensive knowledge of the Scripture is required.

8. THE HELMET OF SALVATION

Charles Hodge, in his commentary on Ephesians 6:17, correctly observes that "The most ornamental part of ancient armor...was the helmet" (*A Commentary on Ephesians*; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991; p. 286). It is this attractive piece of armor that Paul uses to represent salvation: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

Hodge continues, "That which adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence and joy, is the fact that he is saved. He is one of the redeemed, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. If still under condemnation, if still estranged from God, a foreigner, and alien, without God and without Christ, he could have no courage to enter into this conflict. It is because he is a fellow citizen of the saints, a child of God, a partaker of the salvation of the gospel, that he can face even the most potent enemies with confidence, knowing that he shall be brought off more than a conqueror through him that loved him" (Ibid., p. 286). Professor Hodge's explanation is more than satisfactory.

In a sense, God reveals his mercy to everyone: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Even those hostile to God must constantly depend on his sustenance for their very existence, "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). However, the Scripture shows us that God's saving grace is only revealed to his elect, and the wicked has no part in it: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Luke 10:22); "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44); "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:4-6; see also Romans 9:8-28).

Thus, it is salvation that distinguishes us from the rest of humanity. Christians are God's chosen people: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

In connection with the above, Professor Wood points out that the helmet may represent Christian salvation in another significant way besides its attractiveness, namely, "*Take* is really receive or accept (*dexasthe*). The previous items were laid out for the soldier to pick up. The helmet and sword would be handed him by an attendant or by his armorbearer. The verb is appropriate to the 'givenness' of salvation" (*Expositor's*, Vol. 11; p. 88).

That is, the helmet is an appropriate representation of Christian salvation not only due to its unique benefits and attraction, but also the manner in which the Christian puts it on. While the adorning of the other pieces of weapons depend on the volition of the Christian, salvation is given by God. Jesus reminds his disciples, saying, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit" (John 15:16). The Christian should not congratulate himself for having made a wise decision in "accepting Christ," since in reality it was God who had accepted him: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). And the reason we are able to love is "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In place of self-congratulation and boasting, then, we should offer thanksgiving to God, who has chosen us and shown us mercy.

As to whether there is any meaning in salvation being represented by a head gear, Gordon Clark says, "Wilson suggests that since the helmet goes on one's head, the metaphor refers to clear-thinking. This is too imaginative. I am much in favor of clear-thinking, but it is found rather in the previous word *faith* and the following word *word*" (*Ephesians*, p. 209). To Clark, it seems that the intellectual connotation of the helmet of salvation is not strong.

It is true that no analogy should be applied in a way that is "too imaginative," exceeding the intention of the writer. However, even if Paul asserts no intellectual connotation explicitly with the helmet, the entire passage implies it. For example, truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith (in both its subjective and objective aspects), salvation, and the word of God all imply ideas and information to be understood by the mind. Therefore, even if having salvation as a helmet is not in itself a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the intellectual comprehension of soteriology, its inclusion is inescapable. However, I do agree that the intended emphasis may very well be on the attraction and, to borrow Professor Wood's term, the "givenness" of salvation. Nevertheless, Paul reminds Timothy that Scriptures "are able to make you *wise* for *salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Christians should keep in mind several points concerning salvation as a helmet. Salvation is "the most ornamental part" of Christianity, so much so that "even angels long to look into these things" (1 Peter 1:12). But even the faith with which we receive the gospel is "not from ourselves, it is the gift of God," so that "no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). And finally, it is of utmost importance to learn the correct biblical teaching on salvation, since only then will we be wearing the proper helmet, which is able to protect us from any false ideas on the subject.

9. THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

The final piece of armor Paul lists in our passage is the sword, which he takes to represent the word of God: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). Some may wonder whether prayer, mentioned in verse 18, should be included as a part of the armor. Although "the description of the Christian's equipment for the conflict cannot but include reference to prayer," based on the passage itself, it "cannot quite be described as a part of the armor" (Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 10, Revised Edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989; p. 184).

In other words, even though prayer is needed for the fight, it is not technically part of the armor here described by Paul. Of course, it would be beneficial to continue our discussion through verse 18 or beyond, but verse 17, with the sword of the Spirit, seems to be an acceptable place to conclude the present introductory exposition.

Paul tells us explicitly that the sword is "the word of God." In ancient times, there are various types of swords, with some longer or shorter, heavier or lighter. But "in the context of the Roman legionary's weaponry from which Paul selects his metaphors in Ephesians 6, it can only signify the short straight sword of the Roman soldiers" (Markus Barth, *The Anchor Bible*, Vol. 34A; New York: Doubleday, 1974; p. 776). This is also indicated by Paul's use of the Greek word, *machaira*, as opposed to the word for a long sword, *rhomphaia*, as used in a passage such as Luke 2:35.

Some commentators point out that the sword is the only weapon used for attack in the set of armor described. In fact, the sword is both a defensive and offensive weapon. Besides its obvious purpose of slaying the enemy, it also serves to "parry the thrusts" coming from him (Marvin Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 3; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers; p. 410). The implication of it being a *short* sword is that the fight involves close encounters with the enemy, which demands the use of a relatively light and flexible weapon.

That this sword is "of the Spirit" (Greek: *tou pneumatos*) does not only mean that it is of a spiritual nature (as in "spiritual sword"), but that the sword, as mentioned previously in conjunction with the helmet, "would be handed [to the soldier] by an attendant or by his armorbearer" (*Expositor's*, Vol. 11; p. 88), and thus Barth's translation, "the sword provided by the Spirit" (*Anchor*, Vol. 34A; p. 776). The sword is "of the Spirit" in the sense that it is produced by and given to us by the Holy Spirit.

It is when we come to the point where this sword is said to be the "word of God" that we encounter difficulties. There are three possible interpretations here, and since one of them is more obviously false, let us dispense with it first. This view teaches that the words of Scripture, particularly those given by the Spirit at the moment, when uttered through the

believing lips of a Christian, form what constitutes an actual or figurative sword in the spirit realm to inflict injury upon demonic forces.

This mystical interpretation suggests that the power of the sword of the Spirit does not rest in the intellectual content of the word of God, but the brute force that it contains in overcoming the enemy. However, as Gordon Fee says, Paul "would simply not have understood the fascination with 'words' that one finds among some contemporary charismatics." The view in question simply does not consider "the way he ordinarily uses this kind of language" (*God's Empowering Presence*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994; p. 728-729).

Two possible interpretations remain. One claims that since the Greek word *rhema* is used in "the *word* of God" as opposed to *logos*, the sword of the Spirit must then refer to a "word" given at the moment by the Holy Spirit.

If one who espouses this view is saying that we may depend on the Holy Spirit to bring to our consciousness verses of Scripture that we need to confront a particular thought, temptation, or argument, then I would readily agree. But it would be most foolish to think that even obviously relevant biblical verses are ineffective against an anti-Christian argument unless they are first "quickened" by the Spirit for the moment.

You obtain your "sword" and become skilled in using it during your usual training at home and church. Having prepared yourself, you should not require a special sword to be given you spontaneously when you are under attack, since you will already have a number of applicable verses of Scripture in mind. In other words, the Christian should not require any special unction from the Spirit before applying an obviously relevant verse of Scripture to a situation.

The alleged distinction between *rhema* and *logos* should not be carried too far, since "reference to a concordance shows that both this word (*rhema*) and the Greek word *logos* are often used in the same sense in the New Testament" (*Tyndale*, Vol. 10; p. 184). Many of the mistaken ideas believed by the average Christian on this issue may be traced back to the excited popular preaching of some who have applied any alleged distinctions between these two words to the extreme, giving the impression that *logos*, even though it is God's word, is rather useless and ineffective until "made alive" by the Spirit, and thus turned into *rhema*. This is simply not so.

The Bible says that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Every verse of Scripture is "God-breathed" – effective and true at all times, even without any special prophetic unction to utter it.

That said, the fact that Paul uses the word *rhema* may have some significance after all. Gordon Fee writes, "While these words are near synonyms and therefore can often be used interchangeably, *rhema* tends to put the emphasis on that which is spoken at a given

point, whereas *logos* frequently emphasizes the content of the 'message.'" But this does not lead to the conclusion of the previous view, since "If that distinction holds here, then Paul is almost certainly referring still to the gospel, just as he does in Romans 10:17, but the emphasis is now on the actual 'speaking forth' of the message, inspired by the Spirit. To put that in more contemporary terms, in urging them to take the sword of the Spirit and then identifying that sword with the 'word of God,' Paul is not identifying the 'sword' with the book, but with the proclamation of Christ, which in our case is indeed to be found in the book" (*Empowering*, p. 728-729).

This is consistent with what I have written above, that is, "we may depend on the Holy Spirit to bring to our consciousness verses of Scripture that we need to encounter a particular thought, temptation, or argument." However, Fee also identifies the sword with "the proclamation of Christ," or preaching the contents of the gospel.

To this, I have no objection. In fact, I would also point out that we should not limit the "proclamation" or "preaching" only to the standard formats, as in a sermon at church, or even the public preaching of street evangelism. Rather, whenever Christian and non-Christian ideas clash, the believer should be prepared to not only maintain his ground, but also to invade and capture the enemy's territory. And every instance of verbal or written interaction in which the Christian, by the Spirit's help, defends Christianity and attacks its opposing positions should be considered the manifestation of the sword of the Spirit. Thus, the content of *rhema* may not be different from *logos*, although in certain instances, the former may denote actual communication of the content.

In other words, we are not to think that, even when we know how to answer an unbiblical thought or argument with the Scripture, we must wait until a particular verse of Scripture has been "quickenened" for that particular occasion. The point is to use what you already know to engage the enemy, rather than to think that all that you know from the Scripture is useless until part of it is quickened for a given situation.

Let us now consider an example of what may be the use of this weapon as recorded in the Scripture. We begin with Matthew 4:1-11, the temptation of Jesus by the devil:

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

This passage illustrates how Jesus uses the sword of the Spirit to overcome temptation. In all three instances, he uses direct quotations from the Scripture to counteract Satan's words. In the first instance, he cites Deuteronomy 8:3 to resist the devil.

Seeing how Jesus uses the Scripture to defend against him the first time, the devil then quotes from Psalm 91:11-12 in his attempt to deceive and persuade. But Jesus answers by saying that "It is *also* written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test,'" quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16.

This second exchange is a good example of what some spiritual "battles" may involve, namely, biblical and logical arguments. In it, Satan quotes a passage from the Bible that may seem to permit Jesus to jump from the temple, but Jesus is aware that Satan has not, deliberately or not, taken all of Scripture into account. He says that "It is *also* written" in the Scripture that one should not put God to the test, and thus exposes Satan's misuse of Psalm 91:11-12.

Although this exchange is short, much is implied that is useful for us. For example, Jesus' answer necessarily assumes the unity of the Scripture; that is, one part of the Bible agrees with all other parts, and not one part contradicts another. Through this, we have just deduced a hermeneutical principle, which conscientious Christians have long applied with profit. We may also find support for doing systematic theology through how Jesus handled this second temptation, but I will not elaborate on that here.

The crucial point to note is that wielding the sword of the Spirit involves logical arguments based on the Scripture. If so, the use of this weapon applies to preaching, writing, debates, and ordinary conversations in which Christianity is taking the offensive position, or if it is being defended.

Perhaps all this may sound foreign to those who are accustomed to seeing the sword of the Spirit from a mystical perspective, rather than thinking of it as the act of arguing from Scripture and reason against the enemies of Christian thought, or defending the faith against their attacks. But my interpretation is by no means unique. For example, in referring to this verse, the popular commentator Matthew Henry writes, "The word of God is very necessary, and of great use to the Christian, in order to his maintaining the spiritual warfare and succeeding in it...with this we assault the assailants. Scripture-arguments are the most powerful arguments..." (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991; p. 2319). Barth says that, among other things, the sword "has to do most directly with the preaching of the gospel" (*Anchor*, Vol. 34A, p. 777).

Thus, Jesus' response to the second temptation shows us that the use of the sword of the Spirit advances the kingdom of God through argumentation based on Scripture, whose interpretation is governed by logical thought. It is through this method that we will gain territory occupied by Satan – that is, the minds of those who are presently non-Christians (2 Corinthians 4:4-6, 10:3-5).

Examples of this abound in the ministry of Paul: "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,' he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women" (Acts 17:2-4); "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:16-17); "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:4-5); "They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews" (Acts 18:19).

Indeed, Paul informs us that this is precisely the nature of our conflict with Satan: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). While the devil "has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel" (2 Corinthians 4:4), it is our purpose to "demolish [his] arguments," and to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." As stated in a previous chapter, such is the nature of the battle and the weapons.

Let us return to Matthew 4 and see how Jesus concluded his encounter with Satan: "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him" (Matthew 4:8-11). Jesus seals Satan's defeat in this particular transaction, again with the Scripture, and dismisses him.

I conclude my exposition on the sword of the Spirit, and thus the passage on the armor of God, with yet another exhortation to gain thorough knowledge of the Scripture: "The Lord's use of the word of Scripture in his temptations (Mt. 4:1-10) is sufficient illustration and incentive for Christians to fortify themselves with the knowledge and understanding of *the word* that they may with similar conviction and power defend themselves by it in the onslaughts of the enemy" (*Tyndale*, Vol. 10; p. 184).

Gordon Clark puts it this way: "Now, it takes some practice to use a sword with maximum, or indeed with any, effect. This is obviously true of the early modern rapier, but also true of broad swords and the short Roman sword. A clumsy soldier is soon dead. Therefore, if we wish to be effective rather than defeated, we must practice with the word of God...the Christian must study all the Bible. Memorize lots of it. And then when taken

unawares, it will be given to you what to say. But the Holy Spirit will not cause you to remember what you never read." And then he adds, "Of course if you are afraid to meet the public, you can go and hide your talent in the earth" (*Ephesians*, p. 209-210).

One who powerfully wields the sword of the Spirit is also one who possesses considerable knowledge of the Scripture and superb reasoning powers; one who lacks these things may never be able to inflict much damage to the kingdom of darkness. Let us therefore heed the words of the apostle Paul, who says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB).