

SPIRITUAL WARFARE



Are you ready for battle?

a series by David Legge

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Spiritual Warfare - Chapter 1

"There Is A War On!"

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Let's pray together. Now I drove from Portadown today, and there was a diversion on the motorway, but there was a very very heavy fog, very very dense fog, and it all sort of cleared as we got to County Down - you seem to have the good weather! But, you know, there can be a kind of fog in our gathering here, a heaviness, where we're just not getting through, and we're not seeing the Lord, and we're not really entering in - and I don't want that to be here, do you? So let's ask the Lord, and let's become present to His presence, and let's seek to encounter Him by faith now in prayer before we read the scriptures. Let's really get a hold of God, we want to encounter Him today, don't we? We want to break through, we want to have His touch upon our lives - and it would be wonderful, collectively, if today, and in these weeks, we really know the Lord coming into the midst. We believe He is here, He's everywhere, we know that, we know all the theology - where two or three are gathered and all the rest - but how much, at times, do we come in and out and it makes no difference. We need the experiential reality of God's presence - it touches our hearts and changes our lives - so let's ask the Lord for that today. Will you come with me and pray now, enter in, let's pray together.

Abba Father, we reverence You as the Holy God of heaven today, and we just want to praise the Triune Godhead - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is filled with Your glory, the heaven of heavens is filled with Your praises. We want to unite in the communion of the saints with the blood-bought redeemed, the spirits of just men and women made perfect in heaven right now, we want to join with cherubim and seraphim, angel and archangel, and we want to bring praise with all created beings to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But Lord, we want to experience a little bit of heaven on earth, and You have commanded us to pray: 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. So, Lord, would You give us a little bit of heaven right down here today. Would You open, as it were, a portal, just in the sky, that the angels would ascend and descend upon us, that we would experience a direct channel and line of communication between heaven and earth. We believe that's what Jesus came to do and to bring, and so we say: come, Lord Jesus; come, Holy Spirit; come, Heavenly Father - presence Yourself with us. We want to proclaim Jesus Christ, Lord, Lord of our lives; we want to proclaim Him Lord of this space; we want to proclaim Him Lord of this moment. We want no other authority or power or dominion to be at work. We want Your rule and Your reign, Lord Jesus.

Will you unite with me and just say: 'Jesus Christ is Lord'? Now don't say it weak and wimpy, say it with me now: Jesus Christ is Lord! Let's say it again please, and as we say it you're saying it over your life, you're saying it over your circumstances, you're saying it over this church fellowship at this moment, you're saying it over this gathering and this message that I'm about to bring to you. We want Him to be Lord of everything, don't we? Let's say it again: Jesus Christ is Lord!

So Lord, we ask that You will put down every other power, and You have the

preeminence now - for Your glory alone, Amen.

Ephesians chapter 6. I was asking the Lord at the beginning of the week what to bring, and I have to say that this isn't really what I wanted to bring. I didn't know what I wanted to bring, but I really felt I didn't want to bring this. Anyway, I'm bringing it because I feel the Lord wants me to bring it. Over the next six sessions, over the next three weeks morning and evening, I'm going to be preaching on 'Spiritual Warfare', and the armour of God from Ephesians chapter 6. So we will be in this portion of Scripture for the next three Sundays - we'll see how far we get this morning, we mightn't even get to the first piece of armour, but we will see how we do. Let's read the passage together, verse 10 of Ephesians 6: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles", or the schemes, "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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"*

There is a war on. I hope you know that. If you were a casual observer of Christendom today, the expression of Christian faith in our world, you might be forgiven for thinking: 'Well, it was a nice happy-clappy gathering, a teddy bear's picnic kind of thing, quite childish at times - but far from resembling a battlefield or a war zone'. Of course, much of the battle does take place in the churches between brothers and sisters, and observers would be forgiven for saying: 'How these Christians hate one another!', rather than what was said in the early church, 'How these Christians love one another!'. There is fighting in the ranks, there is schism and separation, and there are all sorts of exhibitions of the old nature, the flesh, which Paul says is seen and manifested when we bite and devour one another. We're not in the Spirit, we're in the flesh. But as far as a collision of powers is concerned - what I mean by that is the colliding of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, and it happening as we as the church take Christ to the lost and move into areas of darkness, as the Lord promised, 'I will build My church, and the gates of hell or Hades shall not prevail against it' - we're not seeing much of that here in the Western world, particularly in the United Kingdom and in Western Europe.

I have to say, and I'm not going to go into this in any depth, but I believe that the cause of a lot of that is aberrant theology - error in our understanding of the word of God and spiritual principles. One looks a bit like this: when Jesus was around, there was a great explosion of evil - and that's why there were so many demons that came at Him, and He had to cast them out and all the rest - but that was peculiar to His time when He was walking on the earth. The people that tend to believe that also project into the future, to the end times, and when Antichrist is going to be around, and just before the Lord Jesus comes and sorts everything out - or whatever way you put it in the chronological order of things, and there's a difference there of course among people - but generally speaking, Satan was active when Jesus was around; and when

He's going to come back again, well, there's a whole lot of stuff going to happen, and this pit is going to be opened and all these weird looking things are going to come out, and come upon the earth, and 'Oh, there's going to be a terrible explosion of evil' - but, now, Satan has sort of gone to sleep, he's gone into hibernation, he's dormant.

Now you might say: 'Oh, well, I don't believe that, I don't know any Christian who would believe it' - but what I'm suggesting is not that we don't confess the belief in a personal devil, an actual entity who is against the rule and reign of God in our lives and in our world. What I'm suggesting is that we are practical unbelievers when it comes to him, especially as Christians. We have also often imbibed another false teaching, that when you become a Christian, when you're born again by the Spirit, or even for that matter if you are filled and have a full takeover - which is God's intention of course - by the Holy Spirit, that the devil cannot touch you; and really, you don't need to worry about the devil any more, because you're a child of God. That is absolute nonsense! It's not even logical, but it's certainly not biblical. Logic would say, actually, that when you start to move toward God, then you become public enemy number one to the devil, then he really is interested in you. He's not interested in the hordes of folk that he's already got in his grip, that have already given him authority and right to be in their lives. He's interested in the folk that are wanting to go against his Satanic flow.

It is certainly not biblical. What we often forget is that the New Testament Scriptures are a series of books and letters that have been delivered to the church. Some of them have an evangelistic edge - not many of them, it has to be said, maybe one or two Gospels, but they were even written to believers - and all the warnings, all the cautions, all the instruction and exhortation to be guarded against the devil, to put on an armour, to not be ignorant of his devices, to not give him a foothold or give advantage to the enemy; it's all communicated to believers! Paul even said on one occasion: 'I'm afraid that you've believed another gospel, and that you've received another spirit'. He was talking not to pagans, he was talking to believers. Not to animists, or idol worshippers, he was talking to believers; concerned that they should receive a foreign spirit other than the Holy Spirit which God had gifted.

Do you see what I'm saying here? We can have this sort of cauterised, sanitised Christian evangelicalism. We go about our daily business, and we sing our choruses, and we send our kids to Sunday School, and we generally walk on the clean side of the street - and we think: 'Well, the devil isn't really interested in me'. If you are sincere in your faith, and if you are desirous to go on with God, I'm telling you: you will face a Satanic onslaught, you will face a barrage of darkness and evil, and you need to know how to stand, how to cope. You ought to be in a war. If you don't know that there is a war on, something is wrong. Either you're not saved, or you're not in a correct relationship with God, or you're just rolling over and giving in - you've complied with the enemy, compromised.

Now let me say, if you're starting to sit up and think: 'Whoa, right, maybe that's something to do with what I'm going through, and have been going through, and the struggles that I've had in the Christian life, I really need to listen these weeks. I have to put this armour on, and give the devil a good trouncing, and that will be all my problems solved'. Well, slow down, slow down a minute! Our reading is taken from Ephesians chapter 6. I don't have time to go into the whole book of Ephesians with you, but what you need to know is that there were five chapters before chapter 6 - in

case you didn't know that! They are intrinsic to your understanding of how you war in this battle. In chapter 1, Watchman Nee describes it like this: Ephesians talks about sitting, walking, and standing. In chapter 1 we are told how we are seated in heavenly places with Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, rose again, and ascended to heaven - and effectively took us there with Him, so that our citizenship now is in heaven. We are in Christ by faith, that's our position, and so when we repent and believe, and when we continue to rely on Him, we are seated in heavenly places, blessed with all spiritual blessings - that certainly helps when we are down here, going through an awful lot, to know that! As we come to the helmet of salvation, we will realise that we need to be thinking in a heavenly way. We need to remember to set our affections on things that are above, not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our mind - having a heavenly mind, and our head literally stuck in the clouds, so that we're thinking in a heavenly way.

So you need to be a person who is rooted and grounded in who you are in Christ, what He says about you, your position, your possessions, and all the blessings of salvation. A lot of Christians don't have a clue, and you set a person down and say: 'Now, tell me the Gospel, and what you have in Jesus'. 'Oh, well, I said sorry for my sins, I prayed the sinner's prayer, and I'm on my way to heaven' - and that's about the extent of their understanding of salvation - 'I just sort of oil the works by going to church, and reading my Bible every now and again, and saying the odd wee prayer - and if anybody asks me about my faith, I maybe witness to them'. That is the low-level - if that is Christian experience, we'll not debate that now, but that's the low-level of understanding of what people have. Well, you need to study chapter 1; you need to study chapter 2, see how you're resurrected in your human spirit, and how you're blessed in an incredible way, inheriting all the promises in Jesus Christ.

So you need to be sitting in that security, seated in Jesus, in heaven - you're seated in heaven, do you feel like you're seated in heaven today? You might feel like you're in the depths of hell - but you can be in both in a strange sort of way. Then in chapter 4 verse 1, Paul says you need to walk. Walk, not just sit, you need to walk. He talks about walking elsewhere, but he says: 'Walk worthy of the calling wherewith you are called'. Some people say: 'Oh, I know my position. Years ago, years ago in the Brethren I learned about position, and possessions in Jesus Christ'. Well, God bless you, that's wonderful, but how is your walk? If you truly are engaging with these spiritual truths, it's going to out-work in a walk, walking worthy of the calling - and I would question whether you have actually been seated, and you are connected, if you're not walking worthily. It could be just an intellectual understanding and appreciation of truth. You've got to walk, and it's then - having been seated in Christ, understanding your heavenly heritage and possessions and blessings, and choosing to walk in holiness, by the power of the Spirit of course, not some legalism, but through God's Spirit you walk in obedience to Him - then you are fitted to face the enemy. Only then. So don't run ahead of yourself, you might have to put those things in order before you actually are able to put on the armour of God to face the enemy.

Something else, in Ephesians 4 verse 30 it says: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit'. So if you're grieving the Holy Spirit you're giving the enemy an advantage. Now listen - I mean, if you have a wound, OK? You're a soldier and you have already got a wound, and then you put armour over that wound, it's not going to do you much good. We would say it's the cart before the horse. The armour is to protect you from a wound. Some of us have issues in our Christian lives, and we're not prepared to deal with

those. We're grieving the Holy Spirit through sin, or maybe there is a deep woundedness in our life that we need healing for, or we might need deliverance because the enemy has already got in under the armour, and he has already got a stronghold in our life, and we need set free from that before we start trying to protect ourselves - he's already got in. So what I'm saying to you is: we've got to be realistic here - this isn't just putting this armour on, and everything is hunky-dory and we're protected from the enemy. There could be issues that need to be dealt with before you even start putting on these pieces. Are you grieving the Holy Spirit?

You say: 'What does that mean?'. Well, are you arguing with Him over something? Have you fallen out with the Lord over an issue? Do you know that there is something that you're engaging in that is displeasing to the Lord? You don't have the peace of God because Holy Spirit really has left you in the sense of His peace and His blessing. Something else - it says in chapter 5 verse 18: 'Be filled with the Holy Spirit'. It's in the present-continuous tense, which means 'be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit'. Now, if you're practising known sin, you'll be continually grieving the Holy Spirit, not being filled with the Holy Spirit. So there is this negative aspect of stopping sin, but there is this positive aspect of keeping yourself in the will of God, John 15, abiding in the vine, taking the life of Christ from the vine, and allowing Him to dwell in you, and you are abiding in Him. It's this life of fellowship, and communion, and walk with God - and so you're continually being filled. There is likely a crisis of initial filling, and I've preached on that before, but there will be this maintenance of it. It's not a once and for all experience, it's a constant daily experience of taking up your cross and following Him, surrendering to Him, and receiving all the blessings into you and out flowing from you - then you're ready to fight this battle. OK? Do you understand? Have we got a bit of perspective here? You need to be seated in heavenly places with Christ, understanding who you are in Christ, the blessings that He has given you. You need to be walking in obedience, and part of that is not grieving the Holy Spirit, and being filled with the Holy Spirit and then you're fit to stand in the battle and fight against the enemy.

There is a war on. Corrie Ten Boom - you know what she experienced in the Nazi concentration camps. Her sister Betsy died, if you've never read her book or seen the film, 'The Hiding Place', it's well worth seeing. She was a profound woman of God if ever there was one, great capability in spiritual things. Some of the things she said were mighty, one of which was: 'The first step to victory is to recognise that we are in a war'. Have you recognised that we are in a war? We've got an enemy, an enemy who is intent on our destruction. Peter says: 'He goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Him resist, steadfast in the faith'. Listen: he hates you! He detests every fibre in your being, and He wants to destroy you. He wants to do a number on you completely. If he could get you dead, he would get you dead. If he could take you to hell, he would take you to hell. That's what he wants, for every human being made in the image of God, and you need to be aware of this. Now we're not giving the devil glory - I hate to do that - he loves attention, so do demons and all the rest, I'm not wanting to do that. I hate people who talk about the devil as if he's got more power than God. No, we're not wanting to go that direction, but we do have to be realistic. There are demons, spirits, that form a hierarchy in the kingdom of darkness and they're out for our destruction.

Look at verse 12, it says as much: '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'. Now I don't want to talk about the origin of these spirits, because there's a bit of debate about it. Some think they are just fallen angels, others have other concepts - it doesn't really matter, we know they are around. There seems to be a hierarchy here, something mirroring the angelic hierarchy in the kingdom of God. You know that we have archangels, we have cherubim and seraphim, and then you've got warrior angels, or we might call them ordinary angels - although 'ordinary' is not a designation for angels at all, these ministering spirits. Here we have 'principalities', which many believe are effectively princes. Now they also converge with ideas, but these ideas that are in society's philosophies and so on don't just come out of nowhere, they are spun by spiritual spin doctors. In the book of Daniel, in Daniel chapter 10 verse 20, we read of the Prince of Greece and the Prince of Persia, and they were spiritual entities. We actually read that they hindered Daniel in his praying, or not so much Daniel in his praying, but the angel bringing Daniel's answer in prayer. So there was a battle, and Daniel had to fast and pray for 21 days in order to see a breakthrough in that regard - so he knew what it was to wrestle with principalities, do we?

What do we know about that? Maybe we don't need to do that today? We don't need to wrestle in prayer any more? Well, Paul says we do wrestle - not with flesh and blood - and that's an important designation. We might have enemies in our life, we certainly have enemies in the state, some of us even have enemies in the church - but those aren't the people we're wrestling with. You've got to understand this: this is how we can get over them, and this is how you can start forgiving them - you've got to understand there are spiritual forces behind what they are doing against us. Our issue isn't with them, we've got to love them to the extent that Jesus says: 'Love your enemies, bless those who hate you and curse you, and pray for them'. How do you do that? Well, psychologically, it certainly helps me to understand that I'm not wrestling with you, my fight is not with you, my wrestle is with the spiritual forces that have got the hold of you.

So there are these principalities, and we will not talk about the others, but there are powers, and rulers of darkness of this present age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. So these spiritual beings are in the heavenly realm - now not the heaven of heavens, where God's Throne is, although there are angels around there of course, and we read of demons being summoned back and forth - but they inhabit as their home the heavenly realm, and they have invaded and infiltrated the Earth. So they are around, and they have got Satanic armour - did you know that? Turn with me to Luke 11 verse 20, and Jesus shows there that one of the designations that kingdom of God has come, not just in His day, but now, is the casting out of demons. He says in verse 20: 'If I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you'. I don't believe there is any record in the Old Testament of an expulsion of a demon. There is Saul who was disturbed by a spirit, and David played the harp, and he got a bit of peace, but there is no actual what we might call an exorcism or a deliverance in the Old Testament - this seems to be something that was reserved for the coming of Jesus, as a sign that the Kingdom of God has come upon us, and it's still happening today. It's still happening today.

Look at verse 21: 'When a strong man', that's speaking of Satan, or indeed a strong demonic power, 'fully armed', do you see that? The word there is 'panoplia', you've heard about the armour of God being described as the 'panoply of God', some of the old hymns called it that - it's directly related, it's an old word for 'armour', 'panoply',

and it's related to this Greek word 'panoplia', but this is applied here to the strong man, to the enemy. He's got an armour! You say: 'What's his armour like?'. Well, I'm not going to take time to do that, but what I will say is that if you look at the opposite of all the armour of God that you have in Ephesians chapter 6 - the belt of truth, one of the biggest weapons of the enemy in his armoury is lies. You could go right down, the breastplate of righteousness, his weapon is unrighteousness and condemnation, making us feel unrighteous - are you with me? So he's going to meet you with his armour, I mean that's just a given - you don't need to make any choices about that, if you're a Christian, and you're seeking at least to walk with God, it's going to happen. So you have to have God's armour upon you to protect you from his devices.

We wrestle not with people - and can I give you a little bit of advice as well: stop wrestling with temptation. So you can all go home and say: 'David Legge said this morning, stop wrestling with temptation' - that would be great, wouldn't it? I don't mean get stuck in! Stop wrestling with temptation, and start wrestling with the tempter - do you understand? You see if I don't want to eat the cream bun after my Sunday lunch today, the last thing I should do is sit staring at the cream bun - are you with me? What we do is we try to wrestle with temptation, and the more we wrestle with it the stronger it gets, and it eventually overcomes us - why? Where is our focus? Our focus is on the temptation. That often happens with thoughts, by the way - have you ever tried to stop bad thoughts? The more you wrestle with them the stronger they get, and they multiply. We need to understand that there is a power behind what is going on, there is the tempter behind temptation, there is a spiritual force behind these dark, wicked things and the people that might be doing them and executing them. There is the devil, and we need to be real about that - we're wrestling with him.

Incidentally, that word 'wrestle' has an ancient concept, a picture to it. It is the picture of two slaves who were fighting - you've seen the film 'Gladiator' - the idea of these two slaves fighting, and they are fighting to the death. That's what the word means. When one of them is overcome, the strong slave will put his foot on the neck of the defeated slave. Sorry ladies for this, but I have to say it: he then takes the point of his blade, and he flicks out the eyes of the defeated. That's what this word 'wrestle' means - sorry, that was too much for somebody down at the back, was it? Do you know what Jesus said? Listen: 'If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'. If you are overcome by the enemy, you will be filled with darkness! Your spiritual eyesight will be nil, and that will effectively disqualify you for going on with God, and indeed even seeing the enemy coming at you. There are many professing Christians and they are not overcomers, they are completely overcome by evil, and by the evil one - and it's because they have never wrestled, and they have never learned to wrestle. All these other things that we have mentioned before about being seated, and about walking, and being filled and not grieving the Holy Spirit - that's a given - but they, in the battle, are completely trounced and trampled beneath.

Paul says in verse 10: 'Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'. He tells us to put on the whole armour, and look at verse 13: 'Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore' - and he starts talking about the pieces of armour. Do you see what God's will for you is? Listen: that you might stand in the face of the most hellish opposition imaginable, that you might stand; and when all the smoke and the fog of battle descends, and there are bodies and corpses lying all over the field, that

you're still standing! That's God's will for you! Are you standing this morning or are you defeated? Are you overcome? Are you conquered? Jesus says: 'I want to make you more than a conqueror'. You don't even feel like you're in a war, you just feel like you're in a concentration camp, a prisoner of war camp, you've been taken captive, you've no control any more - well, the Lord is able to free you, the Lord is able to deliver you, He is able to transform you. You need to be honest, and here's the honest thing that needs to come out of your mouth: you need to confess your brokenness, you need to confess that you are overcome. You see, you need to come in line with truth, God's truth, about how things actually are in His sight. You see, you've got to own your sin, you've got to be real and transparent about it - because here's the good news for all of us who have been struggling in this Christian life for any length of time: you can't do it! Verse 10 says: 'Stand in the strength of the Lord' - His strength! There ain't anybody who's succeeding in the Christian life because they're a great fella or a great lassie - there is nobody - or they have got great characteristics, or they're nice - that doesn't happen. There are nice people, even Christians, but that's not why they're good Christians - that might be why they are 'good people', but to be a victorious, overcoming, conquering Christian: you can only do it by the strength of the Lord! Especially when all hell is unleashed upon you, the only way you will ever stand is in the strength of the Lord.

So you've got to then confess: 'I haven't got any strength of my own, Lord, I apologise, I repent in fact, of trying to find strength in myself, or in my habits, or even in other people. I repent of looking to weak elements, beggarly elements, weak power sources for my strength. Lord, I come empty and broken, and I look to You for Your strength - would You fill me with Your strength to fight this battle?'. Standing on the victory of Calvary, that's the only the only place to stand. We'll talk more about this tonight, and I think I'll close up in just a second or two - but we will talk about this: that the actual victory ground has already been given to us! Do you understand? We're not fighting for victory, we're fighting from the victory. The Captain of our salvation, the Lord Of Hosts, has actually given us the ground that we once were fighting for, perhaps, as human beings - but He has won the battle through His temptation, through trouncing the devil, like the Garden of Eden all in repetition again, Jesus has stood as the Last Adam and overcome the tempter. He has gone to the cross and paid for our sins, He has risen from the dead, and He gives us power over sin, and eternal life forever. He ascended to heaven, and the punchline of it all is: now that He has ascended on high, He has led captivity captive and given gifts to men - He has poured out His Holy Spirit, and now we can have His resurrection life to overcome the devil. We can stand in the strength of the Lord.

We'll leave the belt of truth for tonight, and maybe the breastplate of righteousness. Let me ask you before I go on any further: are you in the battle? Some of you might be convalescing in a medical hospital, you've been wounded, you've been hurt, maybe you've been badly maimed spiritually. Maybe you're AWOL - do you know what that is? Absent without leave! You're away flying your kite, thinking you can just enjoy yourself. Maybe you're professing to be a Christian, and your sins are forgiven, and you think 'This is great, isn't it! Wonderful! I can enjoy my materialism, and I can enjoy my friends and social life, and just know that I got a ticket to heaven should anything happen, but I hope nothing happens - but everything will be all right even if it did'. It's a sort of westernised, materialised Christianity, and you're not in the battle at all. Yet there are some of you here today, and you know you should be in the battle; or you're in the battle and you're overcome and you don't know why; and you're not

experiencing the victory that you know other people have experienced, and you don't understand it - well, stay with us, will you? Stay with us in these sessions, but do something for me now if you would: would you just be honest with the Lord? That's the only thing we can give Him, really: just being honest. Would you say whatever you need to say: 'I'm beat, I'm trounced, I'm exhausted, I'm weary, I'm so discouraged, I'm overcome' - whatever, I'm not putting words in your mouth, you tell the Lord what you want to tell Him.

Maybe it has been friendly fire - you've heard of that? When soldiers shoot their own, it's usually accidental - but it's not in the church, it's usually deliberate. Somebody said, didn't they, that we are the only army that shoots their wounded. Would you pray with me just now - we're coming to the Table - but it's important that we allow the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to find a deep place within our hearts. Just be honest with the Lord, just where you're sitting, would you talk to the Lord? It would be good if you took it on your lips, I don't mean that your next door neighbour has to hear, just take it on your lips - it's good to be verbal in spiritual things, confession is with the mouth. Just say: 'Lord, here I am. I'm not hiding anything, I'm not trying to be something I know I'm not, and You know I'm not - but, Lord, You know that I'm struggling, and You know that the enemy has overcome me in this, that, or the other area. Lord, I just want to come, and I want to say that I don't have what it takes. I don't have the resources, I don't have any power or any strength of myself - but, Lord, I want to learn. I want to bring You my emptiness and my brokenness, and I want to humble myself' - that's a wonderful verse, 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'. As someone put it: 'He resists the proud, but He can't resist the humble'. I think that's lovely, it's not what it means, but it's nice - He can't resist humility.

Will you humble yourself before the Lord, and just say: 'Lord, please meet me'? Grace and truth come together, so if you're prepared to be truthful and be honest about your struggle, He will meet you with His grace. Now you've got to do what He's asking you to do. There's no passivity about it. He might say: 'Now, you need to stop this, and you need to start doing this', or whatever - He will give you the power to do that, but you have got to be prepared. Just be honest and say: 'Lord, thank You, Lord Jesus, that You died to defeat the devil. You died to pay for my sins. You died so that I would have power to overcome sin. You rose again so that You might live in me, and through me, by Your resurrection power. Lord, I admit my weakness, but I ask You for Your strength, Your Holy Spirit power, to stand in the battle; Your Holy Spirit resurrection power to put this armour on and overcome - and when all is said and done, to be still standing'. You engage with God about that now. Just talk to the Lord.

I'll just pray for you while you're talking: Lord, I ask that You will come now, You will really come upon people by Your Holy Spirit, that Your grace will be outpoured upon people who this moment are being honest, choosing to walk in the light, choosing not to hide from You, or when You reveal something be in denial about it, or duplicitous about it. Lord, for those who are meeting You on the ground of truth, and confessing their sins, and their weaknesses - thank You that You are faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse. Thank You that the blood of Jesus Christ goes on cleansing those who are honest about their sin. Lord, I pray that there will be a great cleansing work in the blood of Jesus today, but I pray that there will be an empowering work. Lord, would You meet these folk who are being honest with you about their weakness and sin, and would You infuse, would You infill, invigorate, enliven them with the very same power that raised You from the dead; the same power that filled those bones, and those

sinews, and those muscles; the same power that caused You, Lord Jesus, to rise from that slab of stone, and to turn around and put one leg in front of the other and walk out of that grave. Lord Jesus, let that dynamic resurrection power flow even into our mortal bodies. Lord Jesus, as we come to this Table, let us discern Your body. We are Your body, but let us not remember You as dead, but One who died and rose again, and who is with us. We celebrate this feast in Your presence, Lord Jesus. Let us not see the signs Lord, and not You in the midst. Let us discern Your body, that we are saved by Your life, not just Your death. So come, Lord, liberate us, liberate us to worship You as we remember You now, in Your holy name. Amen.

Spiritual Warfare - Chapter 2

"The Belt Of Truth and The Breastplate Of Righteousness"

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It's good to be back with you, and those of you who are here for the first time and weren't with us this morning, I'll be here for three weeks including today - and I'm looking at the subject 'Spiritual Warfare'. We're looking particularly at Ephesians chapter 6, so if you want to turn there with me please do that.

Let's pray together just before we come to God's word. Let's pray. Now I can get things wrong, I do it all the time, but I do detect a certain heaviness in the gathering. I don't know why that is, I don't need to know why, but I do detect a heaviness. Sometimes it can just be on me, and I sense that and nobody else senses it - but let's make sure now that we've got clear lines to heaven as we come to God's word. Let's make sure that we have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the church. Whatever that means for you, you deal with that. Let's come and even collectively ask the Lord to just lift whatever might be in our own personal space, or in this corporate atmosphere, that would get in the way as a blockage to divine communication tonight. Do you want to meet God tonight? Do you want to encounter the Lord? Do you want to hear from heaven? Let's come:

Holy Heavenly Father, we come to You in that name that is above every name, Lord Jesus Christ. We exalt Him, we extol Him, we give Him the highest praise - for we know that the highest place in heaven has been given to Him, and that all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, has been put beneath His feet. We thank You that He is Lord of all, and we thank You that one day - we believe, sooner than ever - every knee shall bow and tongue confess of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth. Lord, we can't wait for the day when the devil will have to say: 'Jesus is Lord'. Father, we just pray tonight that all of us would be completely and utterly surrendered to His Lordship. As we prayed this morning, we ask that this very space, that the atmosphere would be cleansed, that there would be a breaking of the powers of darkness, or even our own human spirits that are oppressed and heavy - the drag with it, Lord, such a darkness at times. We ask for a release, we ask, Lord, for cleansing for our sins; we ask, Lord, for the bondages that might be upon us to be broken; we ask for mental strongholds to be shattered; we ask that we would have a clarity tonight in the Spirit, whereby we would be able to see You. Beyond the sacred page, we seek Thee, Lord. We want to meet with You, we want to encounter You. Lord, deliver us from listening to mere preaching and coming to church. Lord, we are fed up with it, we want divine encounters, we want to experience the Living God, we want to know that we have met with the supernatural, eternal Deity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the only wise God. Lord, we want You to come and meet with us tonight. We are struggling, many of us, Lord, in the battle, and we need to know how to overcome. We pray that we will have Your help tonight, that the Holy Spirit who inspired these pages, He will take them and apply them to our hearts, and open it up and, Lord, really make a change in our lives. We thank You for what You have already been doing

today. We praise You and we give You glory, and we look to You further to do wonders in our midst here tonight, Lord. We don't limit You, we want to say that to You now by faith, Lord: we're not going to tell You what to do, we're not going to dictate to You what needs to happen at this meeting. We're completely - I know Lord, before You, I am, I trust, completely and utterly open for You to do anything. As if we needed to remind You, Lord, that nothing is impossible for You - we just want to affirm our faith in that: we believe that with God all things are possible. Thank You, Lord, we thank You for that. We pray that You will indeed manifest Your power and Your presence with us now, for Christ's sake, Amen.

Well, I don't want to repeat what I said this morning, save to say that we're looking at these opening verses of Ephesians chapter 6. We will read them together again, from verse 10, these opening verses concerning the armour of God: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles", or the schemes, "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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints".*

We are in a battle, that's what we emphasised this morning. There is a war on, and you need to be awake to the war. I'll not repeat myself - but there is a bit of a, what would you say, an irony about this war. We are fighting it, and yet the battle belongs to the Lord - and the end result, as someone put it well, 'I've read the back of the book and we win'. The Lord has the victory, and there is no doubt about this, that when the Saviour died on the cross, and when He was buried and then subsequently rose again and ascended to heaven, He defeated the devil. We've got to understand that: though the devil is very active presently in our universe, the fact remains that he is a defeated foe. His days are numbered! There are many scriptures that outline this. Some of my favourite are Colossians 2:15: 'Having disarmed principalities and powers, He', that is Jesus, 'made a show of them', or, 'made a public spectacle of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross' - isn't that a wonderful statement? Jesus has stripped the powers of darkness of all their diabolical ability to destroy humankind. That's wonderful.

First John 3:8 says: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil' - that's why Jesus came into the world. Hebrews 2:14 says: 'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil'. The word for 'destroy' there in Hebrews, and the word for 'destroy' in 1 John 3:8 that I mentioned, 'He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil', is the word 'luo' in Greek, which is actually the word for 'loose'. So the idea is that the Lord Jesus came into this world in human flesh to unpick at the seams the kingdom of darkness. He came to effectively demolish what the devil had built up, this great edifice of darkness. He came to dissolve, to sever Satan's rule and

power. So through the Lord Jesus, His life and ministry, through His death and resurrection, the powers of darkness become unstuck - that's why He can say: 'I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it'.

Now you might be saying: 'Well, there is a bit of an irony here. It seems an apparent contradiction, because if that is the case, and if the devil is defeated, and if the Lord Jesus has stripped him of much of his power and all of his authority at the cross - then why do we see so much depravity and evil round about us? Why is it that I know my own struggles? Why do you say that we are in a fiery war with the enemy? Surely it should just be a breeze now if Jesus has defeated darkness?'. Well, you're missing out a very, very intrinsic element to spiritual battle and the armour of God - and it's this word 'take', take. Let me put it another way: if Jesus died for sin, does that mean everyone is saved? Of course it doesn't, that universalism. People are just not saved by default because Jesus died and rose again, they must believe on the Lord Jesus. What must we do? Repent, and believe the Gospel! Follow Christ!

Equally so: is it the case that through what Jesus did for us, now that we are professing Christians, that we now can just drift through our human existence without any opposition from the enemy? Of course not! That's why this imperative command is given: you've got to take the armour of God. As you read down each element of armour, it is often said 'Put on', 'Take up'. So there is something for us to do, passivity is not an option in the Christian life at all - and it certainly is not specifically in relation to spiritual warfare. We have got a part to play - and, incidentally, this is not just in this area, but in every aspect of the Christian experience, we have a part to play. That is not works, that's simply the way it is. Grace is God's gift that He hands out to us, and in Christianity He gives us everything on a plate - it's all of grace, from start to finish - but faith is our hand that receives it, faith is our hand that appropriates everything that He has provided for us. So from the very moment that we repent and believe the Gospel, and are justified before God, we are still to go on, through His grace, taking by faith. Romans says this: Christianity is from faith, to faith - it is a faith exercise from start to finish, it is a faith operation. You can't get anything without faith.

Turn with me to Exodus 12 for a moment. You will know that Exodus is a wonderful analogy, some would call it a type, of the salvation experience. The Israelites are in Egypt in bondage, a bit like we are captive to sin and to Satan before we are regenerated and come to Christ. Of course, the Israelites were commanded to take a lamb on Passover night, they were to slay the lamb, and from that sacrifice they would be covered by the blood, and the death angel that would come to judge the Egyptians would pass over them - because God would actually hover over the door, the Bible says - and that very night they would be able to escape, and they would go across the Red Sea, and eventually 40 years later enter into the Promised Land. That's a whole other story, but the point is: Exodus 12 gives us this Passover scene, and of course the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. If you come to verse 22, you see in this analogy - of course it's an historical event that happened, but it points to spiritual truths in the Gospel - verse 22: 'You shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning'.

Now the hyssop there was just a herb, just a plant, like a branch, and they were to

slay the lamb without blemish and without spot, a picture of the Lord Jesus; they were to pour the lamb's blood into a basin; they were to take this hyssop, and they were to use it like a paintbrush in the blood, and they were to daub the blood on the threshold and the doorposts, on the lintel and the doorposts - and they were to stay in the house. What would have happened if they had gone out of the house? They could have had all the blood of the lamb all over their door, and all over their lintel, and all through their house - but if they stepped out from under the blood, were they protected? No, they weren't. Can I tell you tonight - and this is going a little bit off the script - but there are a lot of Christians and they are, we would say, chancing their arm. They are sticking their neck out into areas of danger and darkness and sin, and they are presuming on the protection of the Lord. They are effectively testing the Lord and thinking: 'Well, I'm under the blood anyway, and God will forgive me, and I'm protected' - no. Obedience was the condition of being under the protection and covering of the blood. If you're disobedient - Hebrews, and I'm not getting into the theology of this chapter, we couldn't do it anyway tonight, but Hebrews says: 'If we sin wilfully, there remains no sacrifice for sins'. In other words, to put it in a colloquialism, you can't have your cake and eat it! You can't have a sacrifice for sins, and then go on sinning and expect that sacrifice to cover your sins. You don't find that in the Bible. What I'm wanting to emphasise is the necessity of appropriating the provisions that Jesus has given us by faith. So God has given us this armour, and we are able to overcome, but we've got to take what He gives us, and we've got to use it!

We hinted at 1 John 1:7 this morning, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, keeps on' - the tense is present-continuous - 'goes on cleansing us from all sin'. How many evangelicals just quote that verse - and it gives great comfort, there is no doubt about it - but we ignore completely and utterly the context. The context is: 'If we walk' - 'if' means 'if', did you know that? 'If' is conditional. Now this might really scramble your theology, but I'm just sorry, because this is Bible: 'If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son keeps on cleansing us from all sin'. So if we don't walk in the light, and if we don't confess our sins and keep short accounts with God - in fact, if we continue in sin, and we blatantly ignore the warnings of God, does that mean that we just can be 'under the blood' and protected, and have no consequences? I don't think so. You work out the theology, and when you've got it worked out, you can come back to me and tell me all about it - but that's what the Bible says.

We have got to appropriate in truth and in obedience what God has given us. We are saved, thank God, but the word of God says: 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling'. What God has put in, we've got to work out. Peter in his Epistle said: 'Add to your faith, virtue etc etc'. We've got a job to do: it is to add. We saw this morning that we need to sit in heavenly places in the blessings that we have, chapter 1, chapter 2; chapter 4 and following, chapter 5, we've got to walk in the calling wherewith we have been called. Not only sit in our blessings in heavenly places, understanding what we have by faith, but we need to walk in obedience, in holiness, not grieving the Spirit, but being continually filled with the Spirit - then we are fit to face the enemy, and only then to put on the armour of God. This armour has to be taken up by faith and appropriated - do you do that? If you say: 'I don't know', it's probably because you don't. You would know if you were putting on this armour every day.

So let's look at the first piece of armour that we have here. I had planned to look at it this morning, but the preacher went on too long! The belt of truth - where are we?

Verse 14: 'Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth'. Now try and conjure up, if you've ever seen it in the films or in history books, the Roman soldier in all his garb. It's strange perhaps that the apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would start with a belt. When I'm praying I start with the helmet, simply because I just can remember it better going from the top to the toe - but he starts with the belt. What significance did this belt have? Well, in a sort of ceremonial garb, when he wasn't in action the Roman soldier wore a robe. Now a robe would get in the way when you were in battle, in fact a robe could trip you up if you were running - so whenever it was time to get ready for a fight, you would have to take this robe, and the robe would be rolled up and tucked into the belt. So basically this belt stopped you from tripping, and it also signified preparation for getting ready for the battle - it's a bit like the footballer or rugby player pulling up their socks or something like that. You're just getting ready, you're getting in the zone. It appears, scholars would say, that this belt almost held everything together, the rest of the pieces of armour. So it held the breastplate in, the sheath of the sword was on it and so on, and so this belt - though it is maybe one of the smallest part of the armour, it was intrinsic to holding the rest together. What is this belt? It is the belt of truth, and truth is what holds everything together for us as Christians.

You remember that I pointed out from Luke chapter 11 this morning that the strong man, Satan, he has a panoply, he has an armoury himself. His armour, effectively, is the opposite of everything that the armour of God is. We saw that one of his greatest devices is the lie. Jesus said Satan was a liar from the beginning. He also said he has come to steal, to kill, and to destroy. Now I'm telling you now, if you're going to make any progress in the Christian life at all, and if you're going to be able to stand in the face of the enemy, you've got to appreciate what a liar Satan is. The only way to progress in the truth is by the truth. Christianity is the truth. Jesus said: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'. So if you want to go on in God, you go on via the truth, there is no other way. Yet so many of us as Christians are party to being receivers to the lies of the devil on a constant basis. We have our antenna out, and many of us are passive in our minds - what I mean by that is: you don't decide what you're going to put your mind on, to a lot of people that sounds like really hard work, 'Oh, that would be exhausting!'. It doesn't mean thinking all the time, it means deciding what you're going to let into your mind and what you're not. It's actually quite effortless, it's just a choice that you make. But a lot of us have passive minds, that is: we just allow our minds to be a completely open conduit that anything and everything can flow through. We allow all the insinuations and accusations of the enemy just to come in and out, and in and out, and the media will certainly help us in that regard - and if you just wash your brain with constant worldliness and the world system, the spirit of the age - don't think I'm against television or against this and that, there is a place for all these things in the right way - but many of us have just flattened ourselves out like the sunbather, and we just let every ray of darkness, not light but darkness, penetrate our being. We just give ourselves over in our minds and in our hearts.

Now, if that's you, it's no wonder that you're under oppression. I try my best not to do that, not all the time I have to say - but I try my best not to do that, and I find a big enough struggle. But if you've just thrown your arms up and said: 'Well, if you can't beat them, join them' - you might not say that and articulate it audibly, but in your heart that's what you've done, you've rolled over, you've capitulated. Really your habits, and your next-door neighbour's habits who is not a Christian, there is very little difference between them - and you're wondering why you're not really overcoming in

Jesus Christ.

Let me be more personal to you: is there someone here tonight and you've actually believed a lie in particular, you've believed a lie about yourself. Maybe someone, a parent perhaps, has said to you: 'You'll never amount to anything, you're no good', or maybe a teacher has said to you - I know of people, you know, who don't sing in church because, do you know why? Because they think they can't sing - and some of them think they can't sing because a teacher told them in Primary School, 'You're tone deaf, shut up'. That's right! So they've told themselves, 'I can't sing', and so they don't sing. But maybe it's not a human being that has spoken this to you, maybe you have spoken this to yourself. You said to yourself: 'Oh, I'm this, and that, and the other. I'm useless, I'm a failure, I'm no good. I'm fat, I'm too thin, I'm too grey, I'm too wrinkly, I'm too this, that, or the other' - and you've started to actually agree with the enemy. Now listen to what I'm saying: when you make these pronouncements over your life, you're doing the devil's work for him. He is called the accuser of the brethren in Scripture, his job is just to come along and hammer the living daylights out of you - and he will gladly help you if you're going to hammer yourself. He will give you ammunition to just go at it, and he can take a wee rest because you're doing a fine job of your own!

Sometimes even in the Christian life we can do this. The only answer, the only answer for the lies of the devil is the truth: the truth defeats him. Can I say to you that ultimately the truth is a Person. In Scripture we could talk about the word of truth, that's the Bible; we can talk about the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit; we can talk about the pillar of truth, which is the church - but ultimately, essentially, the essence of truth is the Lord Jesus. You know, I know a lot of people - and I believe in sound doctrine and all - but they get so uptight about the truth: 'This is the truth, that's an error. This is the truth, that's an error'. It's important to be sound in doctrine, don't misunderstand me - but often what they're getting uptight about is their interpretation of truth, not the truth itself, but their interpretation of the truth. I know we have to be careful there, because you could say everything is an interpretation. Well, let me tell you this: interpretation is not infallible. The Bible is infallible, but your interpretation of the Bible isn't - there is a difference! But Jesus is the truth, so if I want to live truth, if I want to know truth, if I want to experience the liberty of truth - He is the one who said: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free' - I need to know Him! It doesn't come from going to Bible College - not an awful lot does, it has to be said, these days. It doesn't come from getting all the commentaries that you can and memorising them. It doesn't even come from memorising Scripture - and that's a very beneficial thing to do - but that is not where it comes from, it comes from a relationship with the living, risen, Lord Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, where you get to know Him. That's how you get to know truth.

I know people who aren't too hot in their understanding of the Bible - what I mean is, they don't have a tremendous grip, but they instinctively know error, they can smell it a mile off - why? Because they know Jesus, and they know when something is not like Jesus, or if something is being done and it's not the way Jesus would do it. Are you with me? If you want to know the truth, you get to know Him. I want to talk a little bit more about truth in a few other ways. We need to listen to truth, we need to start listening to truth. Some of you have been listening to the devil, you've been listening to your own soul, or your own thoughts. Maybe you've been listening to those declarations or pronouncements over your life that were made by parents, or teachers,

or bullies. You need to listen to the Lord.

Turn with me quickly to Philippians 4 - this is a wonderful portion of Scripture, Philippians 4. I wish we had time to look at it all, but just look at verse 8. A lot of it is about anxiety and how to get rid of worry and fears, how to know the peace of God, but here is an aspect that is essential - vital - if you're going to know God's peace of mind and heart: 'Finally, brethren, whatever things are true', true!, 'whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things'. 'Oh', you say, 'that's very hard. Oh, that's very hard. What is meditation anyway?'. Do you want to know what meditation is? How many of you have ever worried? Put your hand up if you've ever worried - is there anybody with no hand up? I'll embarrass you if you haven't got your hand up now! Right, worry is meditation. You get a thing in your head, and what do you do? You go over and over and over, again and again, it's like that little tidbit of your beef from dinner on the back tooth there, and you're twirling it around and tasting it - that's worry. Or chewing the cud is another good illustration of it, chewing it, then down into the stomach, whatever the cow has, and then he vomits it up, and then he chews it again, and then he puts down, and up and down, and up and down - that's meditation, but that's when we do it on the lies of the devil, that's when we do it on negative things. But when we do it on truth, that's what we are meant to be doing: we are meant to be setting our affections and our minds on things that are above, and ruminating on what God says, not what the lies tell us.

Is that what you do? You say 'No', that's why you're in the fix you're in, that's why I am - because we expend our energies on that which is not truth. You see the list of things here in verse 8, go away and do that, and practice what is called 'threshold thinking'. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10 that he took every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ. Do you know what that means? Any thought that comes to the threshold of the door of your mind, and knocks and looks admittance, you just say: 'Well, are you truth or are you a lie?'. If it's a lie, you just say: 'Take yourself off!', and effectively what you're doing is, you're arresting that thought in the name, 'I'm arresting you in the name of Jesus Christ'. Take every thought in obedience to Jesus Christ, don't let it in, just don't let it in! Don't start thinking about it, like the temptation I talked about this morning - the cream bun, if you focus on it, eventually you'll be overcome. Don't start wrestling with the lies or the thoughts, just replace the lie with the truth. The lie is part of the enemy's armour, so if you want to defend yourself against his armoury, it's the truth - the truth will cancel out the lie. So, the devil says 'You're worthless!'. You say, 'No, I'm not worthless, the precious blood of Jesus was shed for me, I'm not worthless. God's word says I'm made in the image of God. Oh yes, I'm a sinner, I've fallen and I'm unworthy, but I'm not worthless. He has made me worthy' - so you should spend a bit of time on that one.

You need to listen to the truth, but you also need to speak the truth. This is a harder one. We all like the last one, but if you look at chapter 4 of Ephesians verse 25: 'Therefore, putting away lying', this is how we are meant to walk, remember chapter 4 verse 1, walking worthy, 'Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour', for we are members of one body'. Now this isn't just blatant lies - we tend to think of lies as a very clear-cut black-and-white thing, but this also includes little white lies - wherever that came from - or exaggerations. An exaggeration is a lie or a half-truth, or being economic with the truth. Slander, rumour

is lying. You see, what we've got to realise is: these all give occasion for the devil. A lot of folk don't realise this - they just think it's inconsequential. We in the West, and in evangelical Christianity, are so naive about our words. In the beginning God said, 'Let there be...', and there was - that's Genesis chapter 1. John chapter 1, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' - and He became flesh, Jesus is the Word. We know the power of the word of God, but so often we are ignorant to the power of our own words. We think it's inconsequential.

I want to tell you something, and this might sound like mumbo-jumbo to some of you - but do you see in a church context, do you see when wrong words are spoken out, they hang until they're cancelled out. They hang around until they're cancelled out. 'Never heard that before, where did you get that one?'. Well, there are consequences - do you remember Peter? How many times did Peter curse the Lord Jesus Christ? He denied Him, he betrayed Him, and he cursed Him - how many times? Three! Peter falls, he weeps bitterly when he sees the face of Jesus being taken away to be crucified, Peter really cracks up in himself, he is a broken man now - remember this is bombastic, bigmouth Peter, you know: 'I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that, I'll die for You, I'll walk on water', you know Peter - and now he just crumbles. I wonder was he overcompensating for weaknesses and inadequacies that he had in his own life - I don't know. But we come to John chapter 21, and they've been out fishing - he has jacked it in, this Christianity business, he's gone back to fishing - and they come back to the shore, and who is there but Jesus. Now I want you to picture the scene: He's on the beach, what's He doing? He's cooking breakfast, and what's He doing it over? A fire. So here is Jesus, here is a fire, here is smoke rising - *deja vu*. Would it remind Peter of anything in the courtyard where he betrayed the Lord Jesus, and denied Him before a slip of a young girl? So there are the same sounds, the crack of the fire; the same smell, smoke; the same sight, burning eyes - and through that cloud of smoke he sees Jesus' eyes, the way he did that night. Then Jesus asks him: 'Peter, do you love Me?'. How many times did He ask him that? What do you think Jesus was doing? Jesus was inviting Peter to cancel out what he had said with his mouth.

I hinted at this when I was leading in prayer this morning: I do believe it's important to confess things with your mouth, to actually speak things out. I don't think it's just some kind of form or ritual, I do think there is spiritual power in doing that - if nothing else other than it gets things up and out, but it's more than that. You even announce to heavenly realms, who witnessed what you have said before, that you're cancelling it out - but God hears it. It's the fruit of our lips, that's what the Bible talks about praise being: the fruit of our lips. You need to speak the truth, Ephesians 4:29, look at it a few verses after the one we have just read: 'Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers'. Unwholesome words - boy, I think often of James chapter 3 verse 1 that says: 'Don't many of you desire to be teachers, because you come into the greater condemnation'. When I think about some of the things I've said, and some of the ways I've said them - I don't feel good about it, but the Lord knows, and I've talked to Him about it. But, you know, words are so powerful.

In World War II there was a poster: 'Careless talk costs lives', the U.S. Navy had a saying 'Loose lips sink ships'. We really, I think, out of all the sins that we take least seriously, it is verbal sins. Yet Proverbs 18:21 is explicit: 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue'. The apostle James, isn't he clear? He says: 'Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so'.

I've heard of cursing in the church context - I don't mean saying switchers and bad words, I mean saying this: 'If you leave this church, you'll never be blessed' - that's a curse. Did you know that's a curse? Because you're saying to that person: you're not going to be blessed! We have to be very, very careful what we say to people. We sometimes put it: put your brain in gear before you open your mouth, but really we would need to put our spirits in gear and make sure that we are in line with the Holy Spirit, because out of the heart the mouth speaks. Whatever is filling up your heart, that's what will overflow out of your mouth. Do we affirm people? Do we edify? That's what we are meant to be doing. Or do we curse? Do we pull down? I've had to analyse my ministry over the years, and I've had to ask the question: it's the easiest thing in the world to pull things down, any fool can destroy a thing, but to edify, to build up, to invest in people - that's a whole other thing.

This really applies, this truthfulness, to marriage in a big, big way. In marriages, are we honest? Are we honest about our feelings and our hurts, and issues that we have? Are we honest about our finances with each other? Is there an openness, a transparency, a vulnerability? You see, when we come together as two people, we are meant to lay down our independence - not lay down our identity, but we do lay down our independence - we don't become co-dependent, but interdependent. It's not that we can't live without the other person, but we choose to need the other person, and to share with the other person, and that means truthfulness - truthfulness, not deception, not hiding. There's a very interesting verse in 1 Peter 3 and verse 7, I'll read it to you: 'Husbands, likewise, dwell with them', that's your wives, 'with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered'. Your prayers can be hindered - you're praying for a son or daughter, you're praying for your business, you're praying for a ministry, but you're not being honest, you're not being truthful. Your prayers can be hindered - God could be saying: 'Sort yourself out, tell the wife, be honest, then I'll answer your prayers'.

Do you know, one of the secrets to living this Christian life - and there must be millions of those, preachers say that all the time, and there are books written on it - but there is no doubt about it, and it's throughout the Sermon on the Mount in particular, the Lord's prayer, that our vertical relationship with God is dependent, co-dependent on our horizontal relationship with one another. That's why, when man's relationship with God broke down in Genesis chapter 3, his relationship with his brother broke down in Genesis chapter 4 and Cain slew Abel. That's why Jesus says: 'If you will not forgive your brother his trespasses, your Father in heaven will not forgive you'. There is another one the theologians love, 'Ah, but that doesn't mean, like, that your sins aren't forgiven!' - but, sure what does it mean then? What does it mean? You tell me what it means. It means if you want to enjoy fellowship with God and walk, knowing that the blood is cleansing you, with that assurance in your heart and your life, you've got to walk in light - that's why it says: 'If we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with the other', and that doesn't mean fellowship with God, that means fellowship with each other as brothers and sisters - but we think: 'Oh, I do God, but I don't do people. Christians! Eh? They do my head in!'. I can say 'Amen' to that one, no problem - but, you see, in this Book, there isn't anything about doing God and not doing people. If we have a problem with someone, and it's a lack of truthfulness and transparency, it's a sign that there is something not right with our relationship with God.

Do you see what this belt of truth is like? It really does hold everything together. If

you can't get this one latched in, nothing else is going to happen. Brothers and sisters, we need to be truthful with one another - 1 John 1:7. Can I say a little word about leadership? I've found, and I've moved about quite a wee bit, and I've been in church leadership and made a whole heap of mistakes - and I find that one of the greatest hindrances to leaderships is a lack of transparency and honesty. Here's the way it goes, from the background that I have, which isn't that dissimilar to yours where there is a very strong eldership rule and lead. The danger of that is the old cliché is 'Oh, we are accountable to God' - so, basically you can get away with murder because you're accountable to God. I'm being serious: we also need to be accountable to one another. 'Oh, that's the tail wagging the dog' - you call it what you like, but you look at the New Testament: there was transparency and accountability even in leadership. What we do often when we are in leadership is, we get intimidated, because it's not easy. I'm not in any way trying to patronise or belittle folk in leadership, it's one of the hardest things to do at all is to lead in the church today - but with it can come fear and intimidation, and then we back off, and we start to keep things hidden and to ourselves - and that's when the enemy gets a foothold and has a field day, when we get afraid. Can I encourage you to do something - and you can throw it out in the bin if you like - but as far as is possible, in areas that do not breach confidentiality, try and be as open and transparent as possible. Listen to me: you don't need to fear the truth.

Do we have time for the next one? No? Yes? I've got one 'Yes' - I'll take that, that will do me! One yes will do! We will go to the breastplate of righteousness - the belt of truth, everything must be subject to the truth of God, and the breastplate of righteousness. Now what's all that about? Well, the breastplate, where did it cover? It covered the vitals, the organs. That, if you like, could be a picture of our emotional centre. The helmet, as we will see next week, covers the mind - and that's a huge area of a battlefield for the enemy, but the enemy does come at us, doesn't he, through our emotions? The enemy fires, it's called 'fiery darts of the devil', he fires these incendiary devices straight at our trunk area. The reason being, Proverbs 4 verse 23 says: 'Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life'. If the enemy can get a fiery dart into our hearts, he knows that he will overcome us. Now listen: this is the breastplate of righteousness, and that's a bit of a difficult word. You know, it's not a word that we use in regular speech in everyday life. A word that perhaps we would understand more is 'rightness', let's call it 'the breastplate of rightness'. This is what it is to be right with God.

I've said already: the devil is the accuser of the brethren, so what he wants to do is, he wants to throw mud at us - not just fiery darts, but mud. Fiery darts weren't enough, here's mud coming from the devil as well - and he wants the mud to stick. In other words, there will be times that he will accuse us of things that we have done, and we know that those are weaknesses in our lives, and so potentially we could go under because of the condemnation of the enemy. So this breastplate is in order that we would be protected in these vital areas of our spiritual life by the rightness of Jesus Christ. This is not our rightness, because we haven't got any - in fact, the Bible says in Isaiah chapter 64 verse 6 that our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in God's sight. Now a breastplate of filthy rags won't do anybody any good, will it? This is the righteousness of Jesus, this has come to us through the great exchange of the cross - when He took our sin. Just think of this book as my sin, all my guilt and shame on me, and really what - it's very elementary I know, and simplistic - but at the cross, there the sinless, spotless Lamb, like Exodus 12, He voluntarily takes upon Himself my sin. It's imputed to Him, and by virtue of Him carrying it away, I get His righteousness, the

righteousness of God in Jesus - the great exchange.

He who was rich, for our sakes was made poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. He who knew no sin was made sin, made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. So that means that when we do slip up, and when we do know what's deep within our hearts that God's still dealing with, and even though we confess our sins, He is faithful and just - praise Him - and we walk in the light; often the enemy still comes and hammers us. We feel miserable because we're such a failure, and we can't do it right, and all the rest, and this, that and the other - but what we need to do is: we realise that we are not standing on the sinking sand of our worth, but we're standing on the rock which is Jesus' righteousness, and we are covered by the breastplate of His rightness with God.

Is there anyone here tonight and the devil is really giving you a hammering? Maybe you have been trying to earn acceptance with God, and that can come from our backgrounds - that can come from feeling that we're not good enough, and maybe in our upbringing being told that. We can have perfectionist parents at times, or we are perfectionists in ourselves - and it's not just the highflyer that's the perfectionist, it's the dropout, because the dropout decides 'If I can't do it perfectly, I'm not doing it at all', and they just quit. We can bring that with us into Christianity, and we hammer ourselves and allow the devil to oppress us, and we're trying to relate to God on the basis of our human rightness rather than on the basis of Christ's rightness, His righteousness that is given to us.

This is about right-relatedness to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. You see it's His rightness when you're resting in it, and when you've appropriated it. This is not when you get saved - well, that's the first time you do it I suppose - but this is a constant appropriation of the rightness of Christ to stop these fiery darts of the enemy. So when I hear his accusations, and I know what I am - maybe not completely the way God sees all my frailties and weaknesses, but I have a fair idea of what I am - but when I hear him telling me what I am, and accusing me, and condemning me: Oh, isn't it wonderful? Upward I look and see Him there, who made an end of all my sin! Is that not brilliant? Is that not wonderful? Is that not worth praising Him for? That I can take His rightness, and I can say: 'Right, Satan, okay, you know me, I know myself, but Jesus covers me. You're not getting into my heart, you're not getting under my skin, because Jesus is my protection, Jesus is my covering'. Do you take the covering of the Lord Jesus and His rightness over you? Do you allow your Heavenly Father to protect you?

I don't know if I touched on this before, but there are a lot of folk who haven't had great relationships with their fathers or with their mothers. You know, father and mother is meant to be like a signpost to our Heavenly Parent, our Heavenly Father - and sometimes when we don't get a great illustration of that from our earthly father or mother, it sends us askew, and even the name 'father' sends shivers up our back, or at least leaves us cold rather than a warm fuzzy feeling inside. So when you talk about 'Abba Father' to some people, it turns them off, or does nothing for them. What you need to understand is that because you have not been protected or covered by your parents, or whatever, you could feel exposed, and you could fall into this mistake of trying to achieve God's relatedness, and not realising you've got it by grace - and if you take it by faith you will be covered and protected by your Heavenly Father. A lot of people, they need to learn to be healed from the hurts and the damages of the past,

and then what they need to do is stop trying to protect themselves, stop trying to earn a righteousness before God, and just take your Heavenly Father's covering over you and rest in the rest of faith in Jesus' righteousness.

Boy, it's wonderful, isn't it? Take the armour of God. Let me leave this parting shot with you: learn the difference between conviction and condemnation. There is a difference. What's the difference? Well, the difference is both of them relate to sin, but conviction comes from the Holy Spirit, and condemnation comes from the devil when we break God's law. Our own sin condemns us, but the devil will heap it on. He is the accuser, he's the attorney that's coming against us. Now here's the key to know when we're experiencing the conviction of sin for things we've actually done, and when we are experiencing condemnation for stuff we haven't done or stuff we have done. Listen: when we confess and agree with God and ask for His forgiveness, the conviction stops - but if you still feel miserable after that, it's the devil's condemnation. Does that help you? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. We only need to do it once too - if we really mean it, we will only need to do it once. He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us, deep cleansing from all unrighteousness. So if you still get this in your ear, and in your spirit and soul, it's not God.

Some of you are living under such condemnation, and sometimes it's Christians, and it's religious expression, and it's sugar coating of biblical truth that's on it - but it's condemning, and you're constantly being hammered into the ground, and there is no life, and there is no liberty, and there is no peace nor joy in the Holy Ghost - and it's not of God at all! It's the devil in religious garb! Isn't it wonderful to be able to say with Paul: there is now, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus? No condemnation! Walk after the Spirit. We live according to the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus, who has set us free from the law of sin and death. Therefore God has not given us a spirit of bondage to fear, but the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts, crying 'Abba Father!' - that's Christianity! Do you have that? Well, I'll tell you: if you're honest and truthful about your sin and your walk with God tonight, and you, by faith, just like the Israelites, dip in the hyssop, like a paintbrush in that basin applying the blood; if you come to God and say: 'This is what I am, and who I am, and what I've done, and I know it all too well, Lord. The devil gives me a hammering for it, but I confess it. I'm honest with You, and I want to walk in the light and I want do Your will. I ask You for Your righteousness, cover me with Your righteousness', He'll do it.

Let's pray. This breastplate is also called in 1 Thessalonians, 'a breastplate of faith and love' - what does that mean? Well, it's God's love that gives you Jesus' righteousness. Yes God is angry against sin, and the Bible even says God is angry against sinners, but in Jesus God has reconciled us to Himself. So this is a breastplate of love, He lovingly offers this to cover our sin and our wickedness. It's also a breastplate of faith, it will lie there in the armoury wardrobe until you take it down and put it on. I invite you again tonight, as I did this morning, if God has spoken to you, to be honest with the Lord - would you do that? Meet Him with truth, and He will meet you with His rightness and His grace. Put on these pieces of armour, the belt and the breastplate. Be honest with yourself - maybe you're in denial - be honest with God. You might have to be honest with a husband or a wife, or with others, with members in the church - there's nothing to fear in honesty, from God anyway.

Father, I just commit these words to You. I do trust, Lord, that they have been from

Your heart and not mine. Lord, I pray that they will have a lasting effect and an impact. We commit each heart to You tonight, You know the issues. I just pray, Lord, now that all of us will make the choice - help us to feel the weight of our own responsibility - make the choice to walk in light, to walk in truth and not lean on our worth or unworth, but to always grasp in faith for the rightness, the right-relatedness that we have to You in Jesus. We thank You for the covering of the blood that makes You hover over us to protect us. Lord, give us the grace and strength not to step out from under it, never to step out from under it, never to trample underfoot the blood of the covenant. May this sense of Your presence go with us now. Help us in this week, may we have our armour on, and may we see battles won. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Spiritual Warfare - Chapter 3

"Feet Fitted With The Preparation Of The Gospel Of Peace"

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We're going to read Scripture together, and before we do that let's pray - all right? I don't know what kind of week you've had. I'll not go into my week, but we are in a spiritual battle, there is spiritual warfare going on. As we said last week, the big deal is whether or not we recognise it. We need to realise the fight is on, as Corrie Ten Boom said: 'The first step to victory is to recognise that we are in a war'. So we want to just attune ourselves to that, even in our own hearts now - I don't know what kind of disposition you're in in your own spirit, or indeed in the meeting here today, but we need to know that we are attuned to what God has to say to us. So let's come, we need the Lord - if I thought this meeting was just going to be another church service, I'm probably at the stage now where I would just close the Bible and go home and leave you all sitting there. It wouldn't be very polite, I'm sure, but I'm fed up with just being polite for the sake of politeness - we want to encounter God, we want to know that we are breaking through into spiritual reality. I hope that's why you're here, that's certainly why I'm here, and I'll be very disappointed if that's not our experience today.

So let's come together corporately and individually, and bring our hearts toward the Lord. You know your own personal need, whatever that is, you bring that need to the Lord now. Maybe you were here last week, and He was speaking to you last week, and you want the Lord to build on that now. Maybe that has been outworked in the week that has gone by to a certain degree. Let's come to the Lord and ask Him to really meet with us now, and penetrate the atmosphere with a sense of His presence. Let's pray together:

Holy Heavenly Father, Abba Father, we come to You in the name that is above every name, Lord Jesus Christ. We want to extol and lift up the name of Jesus. We want to declare that He has been given the name high over all. Father we thank You that because He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even on the cross, You have exalted Him to the highest place that heaven affords. We thank You, Father, that You have put all things beneath His feet, all principalities and power, all might and dominion. Lord, we thank You that that is the reality in heaven just now. Lord, we are wanting the reality of heaven to be the reality on earth. Father, we are asking that Your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are asking that what You bind in heaven will be bound on earth, we are asking that what You release in heaven will be released on earth. Lord, we are asking that heaven would invade earth. Lord, just right where we are at this moment in time, heaven could seem light years away - and, Lord, certainly if we were to operate in the things of sense and emotions and feelings, we don't feel like we're in heaven at all, and there might be some of us here would have to say we feel like we're in hell. But, Lord, You are the God of the impossible, you are the God of all flesh, You are the God who is the Alpha and Omega, You are the Eternal One who is neither bound by time nor space - so I ask You now, Father, in the

name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that You will come to us now, that You will drive out the death and the deadness and the stench of flesh, and that You will invade this space, and indeed our very beings, that You will saturate and penetrate with Your Spirit. Lord, nothing else will do, nothing else is going to do me, Lord, for my need - I've got nothing for these people. Lord, it's not my job to lift them out of where they're at - but, Lord, we know that it's not by might nor power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord. So, Lord, we are casting ourselves in Jesus' name upon You and Your mercy, Your provision and grace - and we're asking You, Lord, to do something here today: do something in our lives and in this gathering. For the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Come with me and we will read the whole portion again, verse 10 of Ephesians chapter 6: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles", or the schemes, "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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* - and we end there at verse 18.

Imagine studying a subject for 100 years - take mathematics for instance. My eldest child is now 11, and in first-year, and she's doing her first ever big exams at the moment. As you can imagine there's a lot of stress and tension, and she's very nervous, and she's studying every moment that she can get - but imagine studying for 100 years, mathematics, or English, or some science, or spending thousands of years reading the theories of Einstein or Newton. You would imagine that you would be an expert. Well, generally speaking, Satan, the adversary, the accuser of the brethren, has been studying human nature for between 6 to 10,000 years. We'll not argue over dates, but for thousands upon thousands of years he has been studying us, he knows how we tick. Whilst you, of course, are unique, and every human being is unique in their identity before God - but just as a human being there has never been anyone quite like you (there is no doubt about that!), yet you are of a kind, you are of humankind. Though there is uniqueness in our individuality, the fact of the matter is: there is a generality in our temperaments, in our personalities, and you take into the equation our race, our culture, and our background and so on - and so Satan really knows what human beings are like. All across the globe, and the different personality types and traits and so on, he really knows what he needs to know about us to do a number on us.

I really want to guard against being demon or devil-conscious in this series on spiritual warfare, because this is a great danger we can fall into - and the devil loves attention, and he would love us to spend all our time talking about him. But nevertheless we can't be ignorant of him either. Scripture is clear: do not be ignorant of his devices. The intelligence corps is vital in any warfare, and so we have got to know our enemy, we've got to understand how he works and manoeuvres against us. We certainly must

not wait until what is spoken of here in verse 13, 'the evil day', in order to decide: 'Well, how is he coming against me here? And what type of stuff do I need to put on me to protect myself?'. If you wait until the evil day, or the fierce day of battle, it will be too late. This armour that is spoken of here in Ephesians 6, that we are taking piece by piece, I suppose I haven't said this to you yet - but you could liken these pieces of armour to constant lifestyle patterns, or ingredients of our lives that will make us better fitted to face the enemy. To summarise it in two words: life conditions. These pieces of armour are essentially life conditions that we need to establish in our everyday experience in order that we can stand when the evil day does present itself to us, when the wiles and the schemes, and the methods of the enemy come against us in a very concerted way.

This is central, I believe, to understanding spiritual warfare - because people have this idea that God just gives us an armoury, or some kind of toolkit, and whenever this problem comes along - well, we reach in for a particular weapon, or a particular tool, and they have a very mechanical or formulated way of understanding the spiritual life. We miss this fact that really God isn't interested in what we do, as much as He's interested in who we are. Even in the realm of spiritual warfare, if He does give us resources; He wants, essentially those resources to change us, not just to change our circumstances, or to beat the enemy - at the end of it all He wants a difference to be made to our character. So these spiritual pieces of armour, they are life conditions, and if they are established in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, they will fit us to live a life of godliness - and when the eventuality comes along that the enemy attacks us, we will be ready.

Now you look at each of these pieces of armour: the belt was what? The belt of truth. So God wants to establish truthfulness in our lives. The breastplate was the breastplate of faith - wasn't it? Of course, there is the shield of faith that we will look at tonight, God willing. God wants faith in our lives, this faith, the Christian faith is - from start to finish - a faith to faith exercise. That's what the Bible says: from faith to faith. It begins with faith, it ends in faith, the just shall live by their faith, without faith it is impossible to please God. So the Holy Spirit wants to engender faith in us. We are given a helmet, and the helmet - as we will see next week - is called the helmet of hope, and He wants to breed hope in our minds and in our hearts, not hopelessness or despair. He wants us to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, declaring the word of God - it's actually the rhema word of God, which is the spoken word of God. He wants us to be people who live our lives grounded and strengthened in faith in the scriptures. He wants us to be praying in the Spirit, as we will see next week as well.

So all of these are life conditions that are central to spiritual warfare. It's not just about putting all these pieces on, or flicking a switch in the spiritual realm and all of a sudden I'm protected with this spiritual force field. It's more than that! These are deep character traits that God wants us to ingrain within our lives, if we're ever to protect ourselves from Satan's armour. You remember I pointed out to you from Luke chapter 12, I think it was, last week, that Satan has an armour as well - he has got a panoply. 'Panoplia' is the word used for his armoury there. What is it? Well, we saw that it's the opposite of all these character traits that are meant to be found in the Christian life. So if you go down the list I've already given you, if the life conditions that God wants to bring into our experience are truth, righteousness, peace, faith, hope, declaring God's word, praying in the Spirit; the life conditions that the enemy wants to bring into our

experiences are the opposite. Come with me, you know what they are: rather than truth, he wants untruth, he wants us to sow seeds of deceit and lies to ourselves about him, and toward others. Instead of peace, he wants there to be strife, contention, and disturbance. Instead of faith, he wants us to mistrust what God has said, he wants us to show suspicion and doubt and scepticism to spiritual realities. Instead of hope he wants us to despair, he wants us to be depressed, he wants us to give up.

You see, we've got to be careful using the analogies that the Holy Spirit has given us here, and all the metaphors and descriptions, that we don't put this into a realm that is unreal to everyday existence. These are life conditions that God wants us to have, in order to cancel out the life conditions that are the weapons of the enemy that he wants to bring into our life, to bring destruction and death. Now, the enemy's life conditions, if you can identify with them, are often a sign that our Christian defences have been compromised, and the devil has gained access somehow. We said last week, he's got under the armour somehow. So if you can discern that there is deception, there is lying, there is strife, contention, disturbance, there is mistrust, suspicion, doubt, there is hopelessness, despair, and depression - that's a sign that the enemy has got in somehow, that your armour has not been secure enough. Over a period of time, you will then be able to discern that these are life conditions that the enemy has been sowing in your lifestyle, day by day, in order to counteract the influence that God would have upon you through His protection and His wholeness.

I hope that helps you in understanding this a little bit more. I want us to look now at the shoes of the Gospel of peace in verse 15: 'having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace'. We will only look at this this morning, and tonight, God willing, we will look at the shield. Now the Roman soldier - you have to understand this is what was most likely in Paul's mind as he was writing here - the Roman soldier, we're used to seeing him adorned with sandals. We ought not to think of them like Moses' sandals, or flip-flops, they were sturdy shoes - in fact, they were hobnail soles - in order that the soldier would have a better footing for battle, in order that he could dig his heels in. Also these shoes would have protected him from sharp traps. So they were sturdy soles with hobnails on them, and he would have marched in these shoes, and he would have stood for many hours perhaps in these shoes. They also had two or three straps that he would have wound up the leg several times to keep this standing secure.

There are two applications I want to bring out of this truth, the shoes of the Gospel, this morning. The first is: a Christian has to stand - stand - and withstand the enemy in the finished work of the cross. The Christian has got to stand firm in what Jesus has given to them. I said to you last week that this is not ground that we are fighting for in this battle, this is ground that we already have, and we're just to stand our ground in the victory and the liberty of the Lord Jesus Christ - not let the enemy push us off the victory, which many of us are allowing him to do, but to stand firm on the finished work of Christ. It's the gift of grace that He has given to us, we just receive it, and we enjoy it, and stand firm.

The second application is: a readiness to go forth with the good news, to invade enemy territory and to take the Gospel of peace to others - but we will leave that for later. Let's look first of all at what it is to stand firm on the Gospel victory ground, on the finished work of Christ. Well, the reason why this is so necessary is that many Christians are so restless. I have found from personal ministry, preaching and also

praying with people, that one of the greatest problems that Christians face is restlessness and fear, anxiety and worry. Whilst we may be delivered from certain lifestyle habits and sins when we come to Jesus Christ, a certain sin that we have tended to sanitise and sugar-coat is more acceptable is that of fear and worry. We don't realise that this is one of the deadliest weapons of the enemy, that he uses to rob from us the peace of the Gospel of Christ. I would go as far as to call it the Christian sin, where Satan has bound many believers with anxieties and all sorts of fears and phobias.

What Paul's analogy is showing us here is that we are meant to stand in the Gospel of peace. It's important that Paul calls it here 'the Gospel of peace'. One of the characteristic life conditions of a child of God is that they know the peace of God. Are you knowing the peace of God today? Paul describes the peace of God as ruling our hearts and our minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. In fact, the peace of God is a blood-right of the child of God. In other words, Jesus died on the cross - yes, He died to save us from our sins, to cleanse us, and to justify us, and that's so often where evangelicals stop - but, you see, our salvation is a full holistic salvation in the right sense, for spirit, soul, and body, mind, emotion, and will. One of the fruit of the shed blood of Calvary is that we would have peace of mind and peace of heart - is that what you've got today? It's your right as a Christian.

You remember I spoke last week of the illustration and the truth of Israel who were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, and went through the Red Sea, and into the Promised Land after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years - but do you remember that Israel's fearful enemy, Pharaoh, he was absolutely bent on their destruction, just like Satan! As I said to you last week: he hates you, he wants to destroy you, he wants to wipe you out! But the night, the Passover night that the death angel was going to go through the whole nation over Egypt, the Israelites - you remember they were to take that lamb without blemish and without spot, shed the blood, pour it into a basin, take hyssop, and paint it on the door posts and the lintel of the house - and they had to stay under the blood! We saw last week that there had to be obedience to the word of God in order for the blood to protect them. But when they were under the blood, there was no need for fear, there was no place for restlessness - why? Because God had given His word, God had promised them protection: 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you'. The Bible actually recounts that they were able to eat the Passover in peace.

Satan desires to rob us of peace. Peace is one of the great benefits of our salvation: peace of mind, peace of heart, and the enemy wants to rob you of it. He wants to fill your heart with fear, anxiety, and all sorts of worry. I want to ask you today: why are you not experiencing the peace of God? The Israelites had to apply the blood, they had to take the hyssop like a paintbrush, dip it in, and put the blood on. I emphasised this last week, and I'll do it again: I believe it is appropriate right throughout the whole Christian life for us, by faith, to apply the blood. It is our job to appropriate what Jesus Christ has done. One of the greatest myths that the enemy has sown in the ranks of the church, particularly in evangelicalism, particularly in fundamentalist, conservative evangelicalism, is that when you get 'saved', you get everything - that is a myth and a lie. Now, yes, you do get everything in Jesus Christ, and potentially all that you need has been given to you - but you've got to work out your salvation by fear and trembling. There is something for you to do, and that is appropriate everything that God has promised you and given to you, potentially, in Jesus Christ - but if you think you've got everything, and that you've arrived and you're there, you are being

deceived, you're being deluded! A lie from the enemy himself.

It says in Revelation 12 verse 11 that the saints overcame the devil, the dragon, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives unto death. That's how they overcame the devil! This is New Testament now, it's a future day, and they are overcoming the enemy through the power of the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony - which I believe is what the blood of the Lamb says about them, or what the word of God says the blood of the Lamb does for them. Do you know what the word of God says the blood of the Lamb does for you? Maybe I could have that slide up - I said I would give you plenty of warning there at the back, but I haven't done that, apologies! I'll get this slide up now - and up here is going to be statements of what the Bible, what the word of God says the blood of the Lamb does for you.

Now you look at that, I hope everybody can see it - if you can't read it, apologies. I want to read it for you, and then I'm going to get you to read it. What you're doing here, effectively, is: you're putting on the shoes of the Gospel of peace; you're taking what the blood of Jesus has done for you, and you're appropriating it to your life by faith:

"Through the blood of Jesus, I am redeemed out of the hand of the devil. Through the blood of Jesus, all my sins are forgiven. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, continually cleanses me from all sin. Through the blood of Jesus, I am justified, made righteous, just as if I'd never sinned. Through the blood of Jesus, I am sanctified, made holy, set apart to God. My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, redeemed, cleansed by the blood of Jesus".

Now that is not an exhaustive list, by any means - but the blood of Jesus does a lot for us, doesn't it? That ought to bring us peace, when we consider the sins that we have done in our past, the guilt and the shame of it. Provided we have confessed them, and we are desiring to walk in the light, in transparency and truth with God, we can know that the blood continually goes on cleansing us from all sin. Everything is dealt with, even our bodies can be sanctified as the temple of the Holy Spirit through the blood of Jesus. Could you say this with me? Say it together:

"Through the blood of Jesus, I am redeemed out of the hand of the devil. Through the blood of Jesus, all my sins are forgiven. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, continually cleanses me from all sin. Through the blood of Jesus, I am justified, made righteous, just as if I'd never sinned. Through the blood of Jesus, I am sanctified, made holy, set apart to God. My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, redeemed, cleansed by the blood of Jesus".

All you're doing there is: you're confessing what the word of God says the blood of Jesus does for you. That's what they did in Revelation 12 verse 11, they overcame the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. What you're doing is, by confessing, you're agreeing with God, agreeing with what God's word says about you, about your sin, about your holiness, and about your future if you're believing in Him. So you're appropriating what Calvary has done for you. For a lot of Christians Calvary is nothing but what they believed the night they were saved or the day they trusted Christ - that's as far as Calvary has gone for them. They believe their sins are forgiven, and they are justified, but they're not day by day appropriating the power of

the blood and the victory of Calvary in order to defeat the enemy in this spiritual battle - whether it's overcoming temptation, or the oppression of the enemy that comes against them, or in particular, specifically here, in relation to fear, anxiety, and worry.

You see: we've got to appropriate the blessings of Calvary for them to be practical and instrumental in our lives. Is that what you're doing? There is so much I could say this morning, and I have loads prepared - but I really don't want to go anywhere, or say anything, or do anything that the Lord doesn't want me to do. I want us to think for a second or two about the word 'peace'. Can you tell me what the Hebrew word for 'peace' is? Shalom - and it doesn't just mean 'Hello', or 'Bonjour' in French, it's different than that entirely. It actually means not just a 'peace', as in when we shake hands with one another, and the ancient legend says that it's because we're putting down our arms and declaring friendship with each other - that's why we shake hands in our culture. Saying 'Shalom' in Hebrew is much more than that. It speaks not only of the absence of war, but it actually speaks of the presence of wholeness.

Would you turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5 - I can't remember if I read this to you last week or not. Verse 23, Paul says: 'Now may the God of peace', that's interesting, isn't it, 'the God of peace', the God of Shalom - although it's Greek here, of course, but that's what it is in Hebrew - 'the God of Shalom Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'. I think I explained to you a little bit of spirit, soul, and body: 'He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it'. Now this tells us here that God's will for us, is for us to be holy, to be set apart for God, to be sanctified - and the God of peace wants this for us. Now The Message, which is not a translation but it's an interpretation, Eugene Peterson's interpretation of the Bible - it's very graphic here, and I believe instructive. Listen to how he renders verses 23 and 24 in The Message: 'May God Himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together - spirit, soul, and body - and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If He said it, He will do it!'

Now listen, this is God's will for your life: God's will for your life is not just that you have a ticket to go to heaven, and you know your sins are forgiven; God's will for your life is that you should be holy - did you know that? Without holiness no one will see the Lord. People want heaven without holiness, and there is no such a thing in the Bible. I'll let the theologians argue over the doctrine, but the Bible is clear: there is no heaven without holiness. Now, yes, there is an appropriated holiness that we have by grace, but there is a practical holiness - a working out of the grace that God has put in us - that needs to be there. The Bible says that nobody who practices this, that and the other - and you know the lists in Corinthians, the lists in Revelation and other parts of the New Testament, Ephesians, Galatians - nobody who practices these. Don't be deceived, Paul says, by what anybody tells you: anybody who practices these lifestyle sins, and claims to have the grace of God, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So there is a holiness, God wants to make you holy - but what a lot of people miss is: there can be no holiness without wholeness. You see, God doesn't just want to make you holy, He wants to make you whole - but here's the catch, as it were: you cannot be holy without being whole, and you cannot be whole without being holy. There are Christians and they want to be fixed, they want their head and their heart and their actions to be fixed, but they don't want to be holy. I've got a few problems with folk

coming at the moment to me for prayer, and I'm starting to discern that they want to be fixed - but do they want to be holy? Do they want the Lord Jesus and His Lordship in their life? Do they want to be completely submitted and surrendered? And I think the answer is no - they just want to be fixed. God doesn't just want to fix you, He wants to make you holy, but He wants to make you whole.

Part of being whole is knowing peace in your mind, peace in your mind. Is there someone here this morning - and you, if you ever knew what peace of mind was, you've forgotten. It was a very fleeting thing. Was it here last week that I said to you what meditation was? Was it here? What was meditation the same as? I can't hear you: worry! Worry is a form of meditation, where you take an untruth - specifically with worry, anxiety, and fear - you take an untruth, a lie that the devil has sown into your mind and heart, and you decide: 'I'm going to receive that, I'm going to think about it, I'm going to meditate and ruminate on it' - and that's what meditation is. We are meant to be doing that on good things, and yet we do it on the lies of the devil, and we allow him to get in and rob us of our peace. That's how it works.

Turn with me to Philippians chapter 4, Philippians chapter 4. Now this is what I call God's medicine bottle of peace, and I know we want to be careful of mechanisms and formulae that are divorced from actual everyday life conditions and living - we don't want to make the mistake I've cited already - but it's helpful to think of this as a little medicine bottle with the instructions written on it, how often we take it, and when we take it, and what dosage we take it in. I think there's a very graphic instruction given to us here as to how to know the peace of God and victory over fear and anxiety, or to put it another way: how to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace, how to stand firm in the victory that Jesus has given to us through the blood of Jesus, to know we're justified, to know that we are secure, to know that we are safe and set apart for God, and even our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

Here's the instruction, verse 6: 'Be anxious for nothing'. You say: 'You're having a laugh! What? You're saying the first instruction is 'don't worry'?'. Well, that's right, that's what the first instruction is - and here, you need to be brought down with a bump. You see, Christians think: 'Oh, I can't do this, I have been worrying all my life, and Mummy worried before me, and Granny worried - and we've just all been a family of worriers. This is second nature to me, I don't know how to do anything else!'. Listen: by the very fact that Paul comes right out here first and foremost with a command, shows you that you can do it or not do it, that you do have a choice. One of the greatest lies of the enemy is: 'Oh, I can't help this. The devil made me do it, he drives me to it. Oh, it's just the way I am, it's second nature, I can't help it' - and you're exonerating yourself from responsibility, when what you need to do is actually stand up. OK, there are forces maybe in your life that are driving you, and there are all sorts of hurt and pain that maybe allow you to use worry and fear as a coping mechanism to deal with that - I'm not saying those aren't realities, but what I am saying is: all of us, in every area of our lives, need to own up and embrace the ungodly behaviour that we have engaged in. We need to say: 'I have co-operated with the enemy', in however we have done that. We need to stop blaming others, and saying 'Oh, I didn't have a rattle as a child'. I'm not saying things in your childhood don't affect you, they do affect you, but we cannot exonerate ourselves of responsibility for choices that we have made in our lives by pointing to our past, by pointing to our parents, by pointing to the government, society, or the church. All those things are broken, and they have contributed to the state that we are in, but we've got to take

our own responsibility.

You've got to realise that you have got a choice whether to worry or not - and that's hard for some of you to take, especially if you are a worrier. You've got into this way of going, and you've sort of spun out of control - and that can be the case, you maybe feel you are out of control, but what you've got to admit is: when initially the enemy came to you with a parcel that was filled with lies, and God came to you with a parcel that was filled with the truth of what He says about you, what the blood of Jesus Christ declares about you - you received the enemy's parcel, didn't you? You opened it, and you started to dissect it - I was nearly going to say enjoy it, but how could you enjoy it? Yet there is a sadistic irony to worry, because you actually do come to the moment where, like a child with a dummy or a rag, it becomes something you can't do without. It becomes a love-hate relationship, where you get and derive a certain amount of security from worrying. That's often why we do worry, and why we fear, because 'If I don't worry about this and I don't fret about this, well then, it's like being irresponsible, the thing is left undone - if I don't, who's going to?'. What you're doing is, you're not believing in God, you're not trusting in God - because that's what worry and fear is, it's unbelief! You're not trusting your Heavenly Father to protect you, to undertake for you, to look after you.

So look at the medicine bottle. The command is: don't worry. So first of all you've got to recognise that this is actually sin. I think it was John Wesley who said it's every bit as much a sin to worry, as it is to commit adultery or murder - it's a sin. It's the sin of unbelief, and it will bring a curse upon your life. 'What's that?', you say. It will rob you of the peace of God. It's as simple as that, it's not complicated - it's sin, let's call it sin, let's confess it as sin, and let's repent of it as sin and renounce it as sin. It's also a spirit of fear, there is a spirit of fear - and I believe Christians can have it on them. You've got to choose: 'I'm going to confess and repent of worry and anxiety'.

'Be anxious for nothing', verse 6, 'but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God'. Be thankful for anything, and pray about everything. There are two more instructions: pray about everything. What's the first thing you do when you've got a dilemma or an issue? Well, maybe you've got a best friend and you lift the phone to them - but why don't we pray to God? If He is our Heavenly Father, and if He is meant to be our Best Friend, why don't we go to Him first? Why is He the last port of call for many of the issues and crises of our lives? Let's be honest!

It says worry about nothing, but pray about everything. C.H. Spurgeon said: 'Turn your cares into prayers' - that's effectively what you're doing. You see all that energy that the devil would ask you to expend and invest in all that ruminating meditation over worry around the devil's lies that he's telling you? Why don't you take all that same energy - it's neutral, there is nothing immoral about it, it's just neutral human, physical, emotional and spiritual energy - why don't you channel it into your prayer life? People say: 'Oh, my prayer life is wick, I can't pray for longer than two minutes, and it feels like holding my breath beneath water'. We get all these lists and these strategies, and I'm not against them all, but why don't you try channelling your worry and energy into your prayers, and you'll become Praying Hyde overnight, some of you! You'll be prayer warriors within a week if you channelled all your worry energy into your prayers!

The wonderful thing is that, like the psalmists - and I love the Psalms, like I'm sure you do, because they are so real, they are so gritty, they are so human - the psalmist gets this burden, and he brings it to God, and he can be really vehement with it, and he can be scathing toward other people. But where is he doing it? He's not doing it over the coffee table, he's not doing it over the Sunday roast, he's doing it in the presence of God, and he's pouring out his soul about others in the presence of God - and you often see this great change in the tempo and the mood of the Psalm, because he gets it off his chest in the presence of God, and then he starts praising God because he's got rid of it in the right place.

Be anxious for nothing, pray about everything, be thankful for anything - thankfulness is a great practice. You decide to thank God for even things that don't appear to be thank-worthy. Let your requests be made known to God, verse 7, 'and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding', it's beyond comprehension, in other words it doesn't follow, it doesn't make sense. It's not meant to make sense, so stop trying to work it out if you've got it when you feel 'I should be in pieces here', and you've got it, don't start working it out, just enjoy it. It's a gift of God, it's not meant to make sense. It 'will guard', garrison is the word, 'your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord'. That's amazing, do you know what that means? That the peace of God, if you do these things - do what? If you choose and decide to confess worry as sin, to repent of it, to not do it, to choose not to do it, to not meditate on those thoughts. If the enemy puts those thoughts in, those insinuations, those doubts - you choose to say: 'No, I'm not doing that, I'm going to think on the truth, the corresponding truths of God I'm going to put in my mind'. If you do that, and you pray about everything, and bring everything to the Lord - not in unbelief, but in thanksgiving - some of our prayers are like unbelief in disguise: 'Oh, Lord, everything is going to pieces. Oh, Lord, you've got to come in, you've got to help me' - you know, that's unbelief in prayer.

We've got to get through to thanking God: 'Thank You, Lord, that You're in control. Everything around me seems to be going to bits, but You're in control' - you do that, don't worry, pray about everything, be thankful for anything, and the peace, the Shalom of Jehovah, will stand sentry over your mind and over your heart. Isn't that priceless? Can I tell you: that's what the blood of Jesus purchased for you, the Shalom of God standing sentry over your mind and over your heart. Do you have it? Look at verse 8, I think I mentioned this last week, and this just re-emphasises what you put in your mind: 'Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you'.

So worry about nothing, pray about everything, be thankful for anything - verse 8 - think about good things - and verse 9 - do the right things; and the God of peace will be with you. Not just the peace of God now, not the Shalom of God now, it's the very God of peace who will be with you - wow! Have you got the shoes of the Gospel of peace on? Have you? Are you standing firm on the victory ground of what Jesus has done for you through His shed blood at the cross?

Now quickly, the second application here is the preparation of the Gospel of peace. There is a preparedness. Now let me just quickly say this, I'm not going to go into it: your healing salvation and wholeness is not for you to just lie back and enjoy it. God

does want you to enjoy it, and it's not unforgivable in Christianity to enjoy it! It would be terrible to enjoy it, wouldn't it?! You ought to enjoy it, but it's not just for our enjoyment, it's for us to take this peace and share it with others - that's why we've been given it. It has to be said that there are a lot of broken folk, we're all broken if we're honest - but sometimes broken people with issues, they get so self-obsessed that they fail to see the big wide world out there, and they're always navel-gazing at their own problems, and their own issues, and their own baggage and crises. They fail to see that the Lord does want to heal them, He does want to restore them, He does want to put them together and make them holy and whole - sticking them together, spirit, soul, and body - but it's with a view to take that peace that they have been filled up with, and allow it to overflow to the world around them for the glory of Jesus Christ. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who publish peace.

Beware of just wanting your own healing, your own wholeness. You see, what the Lord wants is: the strong man has been bound at Calvary, and He wants us to go and spoil the enemy's goods. He wants us to strip the devil of his kingdom. 'I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. He wants us to take the kingdom of heaven by force - is that what we're doing? Is that what we're doing?

Spiritual Warfare - Chapter 4

"The Shield Of Faith"

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We're turning in our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6. Just in case it is someone's first time here, at least for my visit, we have been looking at Ephesians chapter 6 from verse 10 and following, the armour of God. We've been looking at it under the heading of 'Spiritual Warfare'. So last Sunday morning I gave a general introduction to the whole subject of what it means to be in a spiritual war, and some of the prerequisites before we even put on the armour, taking into account that this armour is found chapter 6 and Paul has already written five chapters to the Ephesians. It's vital that we know the context of what's being taught here, and indeed the requirements of us as Christian soldiers before we even get to the point of battle. I don't want to unnecessarily repeat that. You can get the recordings, or I think they're available online, so it would be good for you to just do a bit of swotting regarding that - because this is not about some quick fix of putting pieces of clothing on, and all of a sudden being devil-proof. That does not happen!

As we saw this morning, these particular pieces of armour are actual life conditions that God wants to develop in each of us, so that we will - all day, every day - be protected from the wiles, the schemes, the methods, the fiery darts of the evil one. There is no sense, as I intimated this morning, no sense waiting until the devil goes on the offensive in order to get the armour on. We need to be walking every day in these life conditions in order to be protected, so that when the evil day comes we are ready to face our enemy.

We looked then last Sunday evening - what did we look at? We looked at the belt of truth, did we also look at the breastplate of righteousness? I think we did. We saw the imperative of truthfulness in our lives, listening to the truth, believing the truth, standing firm on the truth, being truthful with God, being truthful with ourselves, being truthful with one another. The breastplate of righteousness - the accuser, that's Satan, he wants things to stick right in our gut, right in the seat of our affections, in our hearts - accusations. It's the righteousness of Christ that we take on upon ourselves that covers us.

This morning we looked at the shoes of the Gospel. If you weren't with us, we were talking about how we stand firm on the victory ground of what Jesus has done for us. We saw a little bit about what that means in practical way, and also a readiness to take the Gospel of peace to those who need to hear it. Tonight we're going to look at the shield of faith, but we will just read the whole passage together. I know it's repetition, but it's God's word being repeated - and I'm hoping that these weeks, as we read the same portion over and over again, that it's washing our minds and our hearts, and it might even go into our memory somewhat. I'm hoping that that might be a side-effect of reading it together each session.

Verse 10, then, of Ephesians chapter 6: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour 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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" - we will end our reading there.

Now we're going to pray together, let's come to the Lord. Let's quieten ourselves before the Lord. I believe in practising a consciousness of God's presence - what that is is to recognise the fact that He is with us, He has promised to be so, but to actually with our hearts, by faith to engage that reality - because that might be the farthest thing away from any of our consciousnesses at this very moment. So we need to just attune our hearts, as it were, to the objective reality of the presence of God with us. We want the Lord to be known among us, to be sensed as here, so let's come and let's just quieten ourselves. We're going to take a moment or two to do this, let's just still ourselves before the Lord. Just relax where you're sitting, and try and relax your being just before the Lord and focus your mind on Him. Just do that, focus your mind on His presence - would you do that? Focus your mind on His presence, He is here. Even say to Him: 'Lord Jesus, please come to me tonight, please draw near'. Let's just do that for a moment or two, just from your heart, quietly just draw near to God that He may draw near to you.

Father, we want to recognise and reverence Your presence with us here. We want there to be no barrier or blockage in our minds or hearts, or even in this space, or even in our relationships with each other, that would hinder You moving in our midst and in each of our lives. So I pray now in the name of the Lord Jesus, Father, that You will send the Holy Spirit, to bring the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into this place, the Triune Godhead. We reverence You, holy, holy, holy; and we welcome You, Triune Godhead; we make space and make way and make room for You to come. We ask that You will drive out every other presence, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by His authority and His kingdom, I would bind every ungodly presence, every force of darkness that would seek to operate in this place tonight, I bind you in Jesus name. I say: 'The Lord rebuke you, and I forbid you to operate tonight, I forbid you. I silence you in Jesus' name'. I pray, Father, a covering of the precious blood over this place. I pray that Your kingdom and domain would come here and now. Oh come, Lord, we pray, and take a dealing and have Your way tonight in the midst and in our lives, in our families, in our homes, and in this church. Come and have Your way, crush Satan beneath our feet we pray, for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ we ask these things. Amen.

Now verse 16 is where we're at: 'Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one'. This phrase 'above all', well, it would suggest perhaps initially, that of primary importance is the shield of faith. There is no doubt about it, logistically speaking the shield of faith would be on top of the other pieces of armour, it would be an extra layer if you like. You've got the clothing aspect, this is something that is now taken by the warrior's hand, and then

added in front of him as an extra field of protection. So that may well be what is meant here in one sense, it's put above the other pieces of armour. But there may well be the aspect here that this is a most important piece of armour that must not be neglected, and I think it is insinuated that if you put on every other piece of armour, and didn't have this one vital aspect of defence, you would be seriously compromised in the battle. It does appear that this is the piece of defence that will, in fact, meet all the onslaught of the enemy directly. If you look at verse 16, you will see that this instrument is to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.

So I suppose that the other parts of armour that we have already put on - the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the Gospel of peace - are the last defence, should any of these fiery darts or weapons come through the shield. Are you with me? The shield, really, is the first port of defence for this warrior - and it is a sturdy piece of kit, I can assure you. When we read about a shield, sometimes our minds can go back to story books, Bible story books, and secular story books, of a round sort of button-shield, we might call it. It used to be called a buckler, and it was a round or an oval shield, reasonably small, and it was easily maneuvered because of that. But this is not the type of shield that we ought to have in our minds when we're reading this verse. No doubt the Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had in his mind what we would call a 'door shield'.

The door-shield was approximately 2.5 feet by 4 feet - a huge shield. It was made of two pieces of plywood stuck together, two layers of laminated wood glued together. It was covered then with linen, and then leather hide - then it would be embossed and bound at the top and the bottom of the shield with iron tips, and then an iron ornament on the front. It was often soaked with water, so that when any of these fiery darts penetrated it, it would be extinguished immediately. What the enemies would do is, they would take arrows, they would take darts, and they would dip them in pitch, tar, they would set them alight - so this is not just poetic licence the Apostle's using here as he describes these fiery darts. This is literally the way warfare was! They would set these incendiary devices on fire, and they would be directed towards the soldier - and if he did not have this shield high in front of him, he would be literally engulfed in fire. Indeed history tells us that after the siege of Dyrrachium, Sceva the warrior counted no less than 220 darts in his shield alone! So you can imagine how this warfare was conducted.

Now, I imagine that if you have been a Christian for any length of time - and I'm assuming that (and it's a big assumption, I know) that you are a Christian, and that you're seeking to go on with the Lord - but if you are, you will know the heat of the battle. I have certainly known it very much this week. I know it all the time, but for some reason this week has been particularly heated in the battle. You will know what it is for fiery darts to come towards you.

Now, what are these fiery darts? Well, we could literally translate it 'missiles of the evil one'. I spoke to you this morning a little bit in introduction, about how if you studied a human discipline for hundreds or a thousand years, you would be an expert in it - equally Satan has been studying human nature for maybe 6 to 10 thousand years, and so he knows exactly what buttons to press. He knows specifically the issues that are problematic toward you, and so these fiery darts are things that will set you alight! Did you know that you are flammable? Did you know that? Spiritually speaking you are flammable, and the enemy knows the exact weapon to use that will set you on fire.

Would you turn with me to James chapter 1 for a moment, I did share with you - I think it was last week - that we ought to try and look beyond the temptation to the tempter. So many of us get obsessed with resisting temptation, that we are struggling, wrestling with it, and it gets the better of us. Like I talked about the cream bun, if I study it, it will overcome me - no doubt! So we've got to get beyond it to the calories, and to what the cream bun will do to me - 'a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips and all that' - equally so with the tempter, the temptation will be tantalising. By the way, sin is pleasurable, that's what Hebrews says, sin is pleasurable for a season - that's why it's such a problem. I mean, if sin wasn't pleasurable it wouldn't be an issue, temptation wouldn't be tempting. It's like Oscar Wilde said: 'The only thing that I can't resist is temptation' - and he certainly knew all about that.

So the point is: sin is pleasurable. There's no sense on any preacher standing up in a pulpit in church, and saying: 'Oh, sin is rotten, and sin is terrible, and sin is really not all it's cracked up to be'. In one sense it's not, but it is pleasurable, and there's no sense telling young people that it's not. You'd be better telling them: 'Yes, it is, but there is a venomous bite of the serpent that comes in after, and the wages of sin is death' - the wages of sin is death. It's the after-effect of sin, what it does, and the spiritual death that it actually births in you.

So with temptation we need to realise our weaknesses. Now let's look at these verses here regarding temptation - verse 12: 'Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone'. So God never entices you to do evil, that's not to say He doesn't allow us, at times, to move into areas where we are challenged and tested - but He is not the one hanging the carrot on the stick. God never entices anyone to do evil. He may allow us to enter a race where there is a carrot on a stick for our strengthening, for our good - but He will never be the one who entices us to do evil. Verse 14: 'But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren'.

Now, what's happening here? The devil tempts us with evil, OK? That comes from outside of us, but because of our fallen human nature, there is something within us that is like a magnetic draw to that temptation - but don't you think that everybody's tempted the same way. The enemy knows the fiery dart, the temptation, to fly your way that will set you alight, that may not set another person alight. Let me give you an analogy: you're walking along a road, and you see a big fat wallet lying at the side of the pavement, big, crisp new notes, loads of them! There it is sitting there, and you have got bills galore to pay - maybe you're a business person and things are really tight, and you're struggling at the moment. What are you tempted to do? Are you tempted? Some people would be tempted to lift that and say nothing, and pay the bills. There are even folk - and don't you laugh at this, because many of us can do this, in our desperate moments we can all rationalise and reason about sin - and we could say: 'Oh, Lord, I've been praying that the Lord would meet my need, and would sort this out, and I mean what else can explain walking along and seeing a big fat wallet full of 50 pound notes? I mean it must be God! Only God could do that!'. We can reason and rationalise, and we might be tempted to lift that. But some of us genuinely

would not be tempted - I'm not saying the thought wouldn't cross our mind, but we genuinely wouldn't be tempted. Do you understand?

We're walking the dog another night, and there's a bag full of pornographic magazines by the side of the road. Now some of us instinctively would just grab the sack, and just swing it over into the field - no problem, not a thought - but others of us, out on our own walking the dog, in the middle of nowhere, would be tempted to have a little look. Now what am I saying? What I am saying is that the devil knows the exact incendiary dart to send your way. Do you know what we do? We are so hypocritical: we will look down our nose at the other person for lifting the wallet to pay the bills, but we'll get knee deep in porn if we have half a chance. I'm not condemning you for that, I know my own temptations, but what I am saying is that all of us have buttons that the enemy can press, all of us have weak spots that make us flammable to the fiery darts of the enemy - and if we have our defences down, and if we don't have the shield of faith, they will get in and they will set us alight! Do you understand?

The process of temptation: Satan tempts us, we are drawn and enticed by the lusts that are within us, the passions that are within us, and then sin is born within us, and then it brings forth death - that's the process of how the devil wants to get a hold over us. There are thousands of ways that the enemy can set us aflame, he sets us on fire. Look at the text: He sets us on fire from hell. The tongue is an awful member set on fire from hell, but there are a lot of other members that can be set on fire by hell. It might be sexual lust, that is certainly a huge problem in the church in particular - and nobody wants to talk about it. I know it's a delicate thing, and you have to be careful in a mixed gathering when there's young people - but let's be real: listen to what your young people are hearing every day and seeing every day. We want to protect them in church, and we're not protecting them anywhere else! In fact, we're exposing them often through the media, and through social networks, and all the rest - even in school they're hearing much more. They need to hear the truth of what God says about sexuality from the Scripture. He is the One who invented sex, He had the first sex thought, He's the One who had given it to us as a beautiful gift - and we need to be real enough and honest enough to present our young people with the reality before the playground does. This is how the enemy is getting in.

Maybe your issues are sexual issues, and you feel that you can't even share them with anybody, because no Christians could have those issues! Uhuh? You think? Or maybe it is business, maybe it is compromise financially - filling in the tax forms or whatever. Maybe your issue is pride. Maybe it's worry, what we talked about this morning, or unbelief. Maybe it's a jealousy or covetousness towards others. Often the problems are in our mind - we'll be talking next week about the helmet of salvation, specifically about the mind. We were thinking a little bit about it this morning, what you fill your mind with: positive things, the truth rather than lies - but often the enemy comes with accusing lies, blasphemous thoughts. Have you ever had that? In a very holy moment, a blasphemous thought just comes out of nowhere - and it hasn't come out of your heart, it's not something that you would naturally conjure up or think about. Now there's an awful lot can come out of our hearts, let's not kid ourselves - but have you ever had that experience of something coming out of nowhere, and you're thinking, 'What!'. The biggest mistake that you could ever make it's to say 'Oh, that must be from me, and I must be a terribly bad person' - and then you condemn yourself for a thought that the devil gave you.

It's a great release to know that these things don't always come from you, and don't always come from your heart - but the mind can be open to many perversities. The heart can be affected by incendiary devices that instil hatred in us towards others. Often when the devil shoots a dart at us, one of our biggest mistakes is that we don't extinguish that dart immediately, by faith, the shield of faith - and it sets us alight, and when the fire starts it's very hard to get rid of. We must learn to use the shield of faith and protect ourselves, spirit, soul, and body - for effectively that's what the shield of faith is doing, isn't it? It's covering the whole person, spirit, soul, and body - and the inference is that if that dart gets in, it will be the spirit, the soul, and even the body that will be affected by the fire of hell.

Let's talk a little bit about what this shield of faith is. Let's talk about faith first of all. Turn with me to Romans chapter 1 verse 16, Paul says: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it', that is, in the Gospel, 'the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith''. Now I have alluded to this before, but the Christian faith, the Gospel of God's righteousness, is from faith to faith - that has been rendered, 'it is a faith operation from start to finish'. 'For the just shall live by faith', now that's a quotation from Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 4, and it's found three times in the New Testament - the just shall live by faith. It's the great verse that Martin Luther discovered, and rediscovered, and upon which effectively the Reformation was built: to realise that we do not have a righteousness from God through our works or our effort, but it's through faith that God accredits to us His own righteousness - just through an act of faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross and resurrection, the just shall live by faith.

The three times that it's found in the New Testament, the first here in the book of Romans, then in Galatians chapter 3, and then in Hebrews chapter 11 - and each time there is a different emphasis to show us that this Christian life is from faith from start to finish. In the book of Romans, part of what Romans is about is how a person can be just before God, how a person can be made righteous - and the emphasis is on the first two words of that statement: 'the just' shall live by faith. In other words, if you want to be just before God, it is by faith. This is how you're made righteous, not through good works, but through faith in what Jesus has done. In the book of Galatians the great controversy was that some of them had started in the Spirit, they were born again, and they were trying to be made perfect in their Christianity in the flesh. Paul comes in and he says: the just 'shall live' by faith. How do you live this Christian life? Is it by the works of the law? No! 'By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified', but it's by faith. This is how we live! It's not just how we are made righteous, it's how we live our daily life: we start by faith, and we must continue in the Spirit by faith.

Then the book of Hebrews, if you come with me to chapter 10, the writer says in verse 38 of chapter 10: 'Now the just shall live by faith', there's that verse again, Habakkuk 2:3. What is the emphasis here in the Hebrews? It's simply the last two words: 'by faith', the just shall live 'by faith'. This is how you actually realise this righteousness, and this life in the Spirit, it is by faith. Look at verse 1 then of chapter 11: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen', and then down to verse 6, 'But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him'.

So let's summarise all this. This Christianity is all about faith from start to finish. OK, it's about what Jesus did on the cross, it's about His death and His resurrection - but as we have noted time and time again as we have looked at the armour of God, it is about our appropriation, by faith, of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Taking by faith what He has done, and appropriating it and applying it to our lives. Without such faith it is impossible to please God - it's impossible to please God without faith! You would need to know what faith is, wouldn't you? You would need to make sure that you're right before God on the grounds of faith, nothing else, nothing more, nothing less, but faith alone. You would need to make sure you're living your Christian life in the power of the Spirit by faith, not by works, not by walking on the clean side of the street, not by keeping your nose clean, and saying things right and doing things right, and not doing all the wrong stuff - that is law, that is religion, that is not Christianity. You must make sure it's faith that is in operation, that this life that you are living is animated by faith - and you need to understand what faith is!

Well, look at verse 1 of chapter 11: 'Faith is the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for'. The evidence of things not seen? What? How can you have evidence of things not seen? Well, you do have evidence of things not seen. I think you have evidence of a brain, I think you do! You're moving, you're showing certain sensory perception - I can't see your brain, but I'm prepared to take it on faith that you might have one. I can't see the wind, I can see the effects of the wind, but I can't see the wind. There are many things in our universe that are invisible and imperceptible to the eye, but I believe in them because I see the evidence of them. But the evidence of God's word is what I need for faith - it is, if you like, the Testament, it is the down payment, it is the guarantee, it is the title deed - that's how the Amplified Version translates verse 1 of Hebrews 11: faith is the title deed to my inheritance! You say: 'How can I know that this is going to happen, that you're telling me to believe is going to happen?'. Well, the faith is the proof that it's going to happen, and faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Now maybe that's confusing some of you. If God endues faith in you through a word from Him, you can have that as an actual testimony, you can have that faith as a guarantee, a title deed to your possession. Are you with me? The faith that is gifted by God through His word. But listen: without this faith it is impossible to please God. Now I need to say this, I feel led of God to say this, that in certain circles of evangelicalism faith has been dealt a deadly blow by unbelief that has come through doctrinal emphasis. One of the most deadly - and I'm sorry if I do trample on your toes, I really don't want to, but I might have to - is the teaching that suggests and infers that the power of the Holy Spirit basically died with the apostles. Have you ever heard anything remotely like that? No, you have never? Where have you been? That's all I've ever heard for many many years.

Now I'm not talking about literally not believing in the power of the Holy Spirit, or in the Third Person of the Godhead, I'm talking about practical unbelief in regards to the things of the Spirit. That is, that the whole supernatural, miraculous sphere, certain gifts that were given to the church in the early New Testament experience, that they are no longer relevant, and they certainly are not present within the church since the death of the apostles. Now that is deadly, because right away what you have done is jettisoned faith in people to believe in anything other than the mundane and the natural. You see, he that comes to God must believe that He is - and what that actually

is saying is: expectancy draws God. You've got to have faith to expect God to do things. Now it's not, you know, a wish list: 'Oh, I would like God to do this for me, God would You do that for me?', and He does it - I'm not talking about that, that's New Age, or something in an aberrant movement maybe in some sections of Christendom. I'm not talking about some kind of wish, and name it and claim it. What I'm talking about is what the word of God promises, what faith has been induced in us to believe is God's will for us, and we then expect it - no matter how hare-brained it seems to be in the natural sphere, in the natural realm. You see, the word brings faith, and when it is animated by the Holy Spirit, we come and we cry to God, and we have the petitions we have asked of Him when we have asked according to His will - and then we get it - but there has to be expectancy.

If you remember, we were in James chapter 1 there, and it says: 'You have not because you ask not; and then many of you ask and you don't have, because you ask amiss to consume it upon your lusts'. If you're double-minded, forget about asking, for you're unstable in all your ways and you will get nothing from the Lord - double-mindedness, double-mindedness, unbelief, unbelief. Are you with me? Now, what do you think unbelief would do to the shield of faith? Well, it relegates it to nonexistence - because, listen: faith and unbelief are mutually exclusive. By the way, just harping a bit back to this morning: fear and faith are mutually exclusive. Often our theologies come out of fear. Now please don't misunderstand me: I'm not suggesting that we go around telling people to stop taking medication, and we start claiming these things in the name of the Lord Jesus that we have no right to claim - I'm not saying that. But I am asking the question: is it often the case that our theological constructs can be formed out of fear of God not coming through? God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and a sound mind.

But I want to move on, because I don't want to talk about faith in a conceptual way. Sometimes we do this in Christianity: we talk about faith, and love, and peace, and all these things as attributes, as if they are separated in some way from the personality of God, and they're not. I actually believe here that faith is God Himself, the shield of faith is God Himself. Let me show you this. This is the only reference in the New Testament to a shield, alright? So we really need to go into the Old Testament to find out a little bit more. I want you to look at two texts, first of all I want you to go to Genesis chapter 15. Now the context of this verse is that Abram is just at the end of a struggle against the unbelieving Kings of the plain who had attacked the King of Sodom and his allies. You don't need to worry too much about that, if you don't understand it go home and read it - but that is the context of battle, it's a fight. Abram is God's man, by the way, he's the man of faith, he's God's friend - what a picture for us. Here in chapter 15 of Genesis, verse 1, it says: 'After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward'' - what a statement! I mean, Abram was just one man, wasn't he? Now I know he had a band of men behind him, and he was a very wealthy and capable man in various respects - but God was with him, and God was his shield, and God was his reward. He wouldn't even receive a reward from the King of Sodom, he looked, he said, up to the Living God for his provisions and his well-being.

Now, you see, I think there's a link here - that God is our shield, God is our reward. By the way, I think here's a word for some people in the meeting tonight - it's for all of us, but all of us may not be able to receive it. God is your defence, God! I remember years ago reading a little booklet by A.W. Tozer, 'How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit'

- and I'm always a wee bit wary of books on 'how do we do this', and 'how to do that', you could buy a hundred of them and find a hundred different ways, but A.W. Tozer is very reliable. He was really not talking about how to initially have a crisis of infilling by faith, he was talking about how to maintain a Spirit-filled life. One of the little tips that he gave for everyday daily experience to remain filled with the Holy Spirit was this: never defend yourself, never defend yourself. Now please don't misunderstand that statement. He's not saying that you just become a doormat, he's not saying that if you're in a bullying or abusive situation that you just put up with it - that's not what we're talking about. What we are talking about is that inner fleshly desire to always get one up on someone, or always have the last word, or always win out in the end - or, if we are wronged, if we have been wronged and we know we are in the right, we have to let people know it, and they need to know the whole truth. Justice must be done, but it has to be seen and heard to be done! We have to have our pound of flesh, we have to protect our good name and defend ourselves. I know the natural objections that come in the flesh when we talk like this - I could argue it all day - but the best thing for me to do is just to say this: when He was reviled, He reviled not again, but He committed himself to the Just Judge in heaven - this is my translation - who will iron out all the creases on the final day.

The Lord is your defence. Do you know what I find the best thing to do? Don't think I've got a persecution complex, I don't - I like to think most people like me! But more and more as I go through ministry, and as you stand by your convictions, you realise that you ruffle a few feathers - and there is a temptation to defend yourself, even from the pulpit. It's a big one. You wouldn't deck somebody at the door, but you'd have a jolly good job in your sermon at giving them a rough time - there is a temptation there. I've probably used the pulpit several times like that in the past, but that's defending yourself - that's the flesh. The Lord will defend me if I'm right, and He'll even defend me when I'm wrong - but I don't need to do it. But do you see how the Lord here is the shield and the reward?

Then a second mention is Moses in his song of praise. If you go to Deuteronomy 33, Moses is extolling the majesty of the God of Israel, and in Deuteronomy 33 we begin reading at verse 27 - some of you are familiar with these words: 'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, 'Destroy!'. Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew. Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places'. Wow! That would be worthy of you revisiting, wouldn't it, and going through each of those statements? God will fight for us, the battle belongs to the Lord. Remember: we are not wrestling with flesh and blood, Ephesians 6:12. So I might disagree with you, and in fact you might have daggers toward me, but my issue is not with you - it's with whatever the forces are behind you that want to make you feel that way. My issue is not with Charles Darwin, my issue is not with Richard Dawkins, my issue is with the forces that are manipulating behind him and behind aggressive atheism and secularism in our society. My issue is not with homosexual people, I am called to love them in Jesus' name - my issue is with the forces of darkness that are perverting God's creative order and sexual ideal. Are you with me?

So often we are seen to be wrestling with people, battling with people - and the church

has been so guilty of that all down through the ages. When you talk about spiritual warfare, they think you're talking about jihad - whether it's the Islamists, or whether it's the Crusaders of the Middle Ages - it's taking an actual sword. Our land needs to repent of having taken up arms - and I'm not talking about the Provos and the UDA, that was nothing to do with religion, never has been - I'm talking about way back when men signed covenants in order to take up arms to defend their beliefs, and it was ungodly, it was ungodly. The Lord will fight for us, we are a New Covenant people, He is our defence.

Now turn with me quickly, and I'll wrap it up soon, to 1 Peter 5 verse 8. Here's another one of these exhortations and warnings from the apostle Peter this time. Do you remember I said that, without any exception as far as I'm aware, all the portions of Scripture in the New Testament warning us about the devil are written to Christians? I hear people telling me: 'Oh, the devil can't touch you when you're under the blood. When you're under the blood, that's it, the devil can't touch you'. Really? Is that why so much Scripture is warning Christians to be careful of the enemy, and not be ignorant of his devices, not give him a foothold either in our lives or in the church? Is that why He has given us an armour to put on, because there are fiery darts coming at us? Is that why, in my everyday prayer ministry that I do privately at home, that I am dealing with Christians on a regular basis who are demonised? Is that why? Verse 8 says: 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour'. As I said to you, he hates you and he wants to destroy you. Now, how do we deal with him? 'Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world'. How do we resist him? Steadfast in the - what? Faith! Now that's not just what we believe, that's how we believe: steadfast, resisting the enemy, standing with those gospel shoes on, but with the shield of faith - that's how we believe.

It's mighty, I'm telling you. Leonard Ravenhill, I think it was, who said in a mighty book I would highly recommend to you, it would be great if you started reading this one - all of you - 'Why Revival Tarries'. Has anybody ever read that book, 'Why Revival Tarries', by Leonard Ravenhill? One? Wow! There's some work to do there - it's very cheap, you can probably get it in Ards Bookshop - 'Why Revival Tarries', Leonard Ravenhill, a mighty book. One of the things he said in that book is: 'One of these days some simple soul will take up the book of God and will believe it, and we will all be left with red faces'.

The shield of faith is what will overcome. Turn with me quickly to 1 John, and this is an encouragement for young men. Young men, you're struggling with all sorts of problems - not just young men, young women as well, and some not so young men and women. But, you know, you would think it was the 21st-century invented some of these modern day temptations and problems. The truth of the matter is - and I do believe we are coming near the Lord's return, and there is a falling away and all the rest - but the fact of the matter is: in first century civilisation, a lot of these sins were more prevalent in society than they even are yet today in our society. We're very quickly getting there, but you only need to read Romans 1, you need to read the history books of what went on in the Roman Empire - and you start to realise it. So listen, young people: early Christians had the temptations that you're going through, nothing peculiar about this particular day and age. But listen to what John says in 1 John 4 verse 4: 'You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' - now you've got to make sure He

is in you, you've got to make sure you're born again, and you really need to be filled with the Holy Spirit - but then you can know that the Lord is filling you and possessing you, and you can believe that He is greater than anything outside of you that would seek to overcome you. Look at verse 18: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love'. You've got love, not fear; and you can overcome the enemy!

There is a statement later on in this book about you young men overcoming the enemy, about old men overcoming the enemy, about it being our faith that has overcome the world - it is even our faith that overcomes! Now, it's not my intention to be overly controversial in this statement, but the book of Revelation has a lot of question marks for me - but one of them, and maybe some of you can enlighten me on this, is the group in the book of Revelation called 'the overcomers'. They don't fit terribly well in a lot of theological ideas that we have about the book of Revelation, save to say this: it talks about a world engulfed in persecution and tribulation, and in the seven letters that Christ gave to the seven churches through the apostle John, He exhorted them all to overcome - to overcome sin, to overcome Satan, to overcome the darkness. It is to the overcomers that the promises of the book of Revelation are given. Now you can iron all that out if you want, but what I'm trying to say to you is: there is faith to overcome, even a world engulfed with antichrist and the beast and the false prophet, and hellish devilishness that is just engulfing the world that will come out of many a pit. There is faith in God that overcomes, and this shield is simply laying hold upon God - it's simply laying hold upon God.

Underneath, round about, like a shield - but here's the punchline: you've got to take this shield. You see it? It comes from outside of you, look at the verse, verse 16, it comes from outside of you - you've got to take, like every piece of armour, you've got to put it on - but specifically it says: 'Take the shield of faith'. You've got to reach out, and you've got to surround yourself with the protection of your Heavenly Father. Is that what you do? Is that what you do on a regular basis? Incidentally, in the Roman battalions the soldiers, when they were moving in a troop, if they were attacked together - you've maybe seen it on history programmes, or in books - they would link their shields together, they would interlock their shields together over their heads and make it a canopy of protection, like a solid wall against the enemy. Yes, there is faith in God and in His promises, and how we believe - not listening to the lies of the enemy, but believing the truth of God - and that will work individually as, day by day, we decide, 'I'm not going to worry, I'm not going to fear, I'm not going to be my own protector. I'm going to take God as my protection, my shield and exceeding great reward. I'm going to let Him be my defence against the enemies'. But listen: what a power there is against the enemy when we, as an army together, link shields - stop fighting one another and link shields! You know, the enemy is out there - did you know that? Sometimes he does get in here, but he's meant to be out there. We are meant to be pulling down strongholds, and every argumentation against the knowledge of God. We've got weapons that are mighty through God, weapons that are not carnal but are spiritual and mighty through God - and that's the battle we are meant to be in, and that battle belongs to the Lord.

Have you got the shield of faith? I'll never forget first hearing that story of those American missionaries, one of whom was the famous Jim Elliot, who went to witness to a virgin tribe who had never known Christ nor the Gospel - the Auca Indians in South America. This is in the 40s or 50s, before they went out - and they would go out to

their death - they sang that old hymn:

'We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender!
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go'.

Another old hymn puts it like this:

'The storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?'

Spiritual Warfare - Chapter 5

"The Helmet Of Salvation"

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Let's come to the Lord just now, before we come to the scriptures - it's Ephesians 6, if you want to turn to it, we've been there thus far and we're looking at it again this morning. Let's just still ourselves before the Lord and wait upon Him now, and ask for Him to come very close to us. I hope you have sensed His presence already, and we want to go deeper, we want to experience more of the Lord now - so please do open your heart before Him, and seek His face for your own personal needs, but corporately for this moment and for this meeting, that the Lord may come to us. Let's come and seek His face now:

Lord, we do unite together in the note of praise that has already been expressed, and we want to join with all of creation and all of redeemed creation to extol the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We exalt Him whose name is above all. Lord, we long for that day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth - when not just men and angels, but devils and demons will declare that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. We thank You, Lord, that by grace we are found in that redeemed company now. We thank You for the communion of the saints, and how at this very moment we are united with all the redeemed world in heaven and on earth, we're united with the spirits of just men and women made perfect gathered around the glassy sea at this moment, singing praise unto the Lamb that was slain and has loosed us from our sins in His own blood. We declare glory and honour, blessing and power, be unto Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. We bless the name of the Lord Jesus this morning, we bless the Lamb that was slain. We thank You for the precious blood, Father. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You came and You shed Your blood for us. We thank You, Holy Spirit, that You have applied the shed blood to our hearts, and You have delivered our consciences from dead works to serve the Living God. Oh, we can come boldly now, Lord, because of that shed blood. We come and we take the Kingdom by force this morning, Lord, and we want there to be a releasing of Your power, that what we are experiencing in the Spirit as we worship You now would be realised on earth. We pray again that Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. May Your kingdom break out among us in this little gathering just now. We thank You for the day that is coming when the kingdom will be consummated on this earth, and Jesus shall reign wherever the sun does its successive journeys run. But Lord, we believe that the Kingdom is within us now in spirit, and we want You to come to our now, we want You to come to our dominion, our domain, and bring Your kingdom, Your rule and Your reign. So come now, we take authority over every other force, or power, or spirit of influence in this gathering, and we bind it in the name of the Lord Jesus. We ask for a releasing of Your power by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians chapter 6, and we will read the whole passage again - I've been hoping that it would get into your head as we read it together, and into your heart. Verse 10: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the*

whole armour 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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints".

Now if you haven't been with us so far - well, you've missed most of the armour for a start, it would be good for you to catch up on that. I'm not going to recap even to the extent that I have done on previous occasions. I want to enter right in this morning, because we have an awful lot to share regarding the helmet of salvation. Verse 17 - 'Take the helmet of salvation'. Now we have said that the apostle Paul probably had in mind a Roman soldier, a warrior adorned in Roman armour. We have covered other parts of the armour: the belt of truth; the breastplate of righteousness; feet shod with the preparation, the sandals of the Gospel of peace; and the shield of faith - but now we're looking at this helmet of salvation. I'm sure most of you have seen in history books, or on television or in films, the idea of this Roman soldier's helmet. It was made of bronze, and it had leather attachments and straps to fasten it on. It had a band to protect the forehead area, then it had two plates that came down the cheeks - a bit like sideburns - to protect the cheek areas. There was also a piece of metal that came down over the back of the neck to protect the neck area. When that helmet was strapped in place it was very secure, and all that really was exposed were the eyes, the nose, and the mouth area.

Now it is obvious, but we would do well just to repeat the obvious, that the head is a very delicate area, and it is imperative in warfare that the head is protected - because the deadliest wounds can be suffered in the head. We saw the importance of the breastplate of righteousness covering the vital areas of the chest area, the trunk where all the organs are entailed - but the head is equally as important, the brain and the sensory perception. If an injury was inflicted upon them, that would be the end, probably, of the soldier. If the soldier lost a limb, even if he lost an arm - probably not a leg - but if he lost an arm he could continue to fight with his other arm, he could resist the enemy. But if he loses his head, it's all over! Agreed? So this is why the helmet of salvation speaks to us of something vital in this spiritual battle that we are engaged in - it's called the helmet of salvation.

Now that little word 'salvation', we use it so often in Christian experience that we can actually lose its meaning. We tend to think of salvation as meaning going to heaven when we die, or being saved from hell. I have to say to you that whilst that's part of what it is to be saved, being saved in Scripture has got an awful lot more to do with being saved from sin and being saved from this world. It does have a long-term aspect, but another word could be used for 'salvation' or 'saved', it's the word 'rescue' or 'deliver'. So you could call this helmet the helmet of deliverance, or the helmet of rescue. In Isaiah 59 verse 17 - we'll not look at it this morning, but it would be good for you to read Isaiah 59, because there it shows a picture of the Living God adorned in armour. You can correspond the pieces of the armour of God that He gives us to the

actual armour that He wears Himself - so that tells us it's His armour, it's His very being that He gives to us. In verse 17 it's described as 'the helmet of God's salvation', this is God's deliverance of us and it is vital for Christian experience.

I just finished in my own devotions reading the epistle of 1 John, and I've taken it very slowly as I've read it. More than ever - and I've read it many times, and I've preached on it - but more than I ever have before, I noticed, maybe it was the translation I was reading, I noticed this word 'know' constantly repeated over and over again. 'This is how we know', 'This is how we can know', 'We can know' - and the key verse really is at the end of chapter 5: 'I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life'. You see, there is something about knowledge in Christianity that is vital to our experience. Now please don't misconstrue and confound knowledge with experience, they are not one and the same thing. You can have a lot of knowledge, but lack a great deal of experience - but I think it's true to say that you can't really have experience without the knowledge first, to a certain degree. That's why, for instance, in the book of Ephesians the first three chapters are really talking to us about who we are in Christ, seated in heavenly places - I've shown you this before in our introduction - and all the things that come to us, accrue to us in our Lord Jesus, what He has done when He died and rose again and ascended into heaven, and we sitting with Him. Do you remember I spoke to you about: 'sit, walk, stand', and how we've got to understand how we are seated with Christ first, chapters 1 and 2; how we have to walk with Christ, chapters 3 and 4 and 5; and then we will be able to stand against the enemy. But that knowledge is priceless, it is so valuable in the spiritual battle that we are all engaged in to know whom we have believed, and to be persuaded - and that's more than an intellectual assent. When we talk about knowledge we're not talking about how much of the Bible we know, or how well we would perform in a scriptural intelligence quiz - I used to hate those quizzes! But that's not what we're talking about - you could know the Bible back to front and it would do you no good at all, if it doesn't go deep down into your heart, into your spirit, and into your soul. You can say: 'I know and am persuaded', this is a knowledge that makes a difference to my life, to my everyday experience. The helmet of salvation does that, where you - effectively - when you meet the enemy in the battle, you can remind yourself of truth, but truth that actually makes a difference to your heart.

So the knowledge of truth is vital. Sometimes I think if you sat down most believers and quizzed them over their knowledge of who they are in Christ, what Jesus has done for them, and what comes to them in experience through the work of Christ - there is very little that is actually expressed, there is very little true knowledge. You might get something like: 'Oh, I have repented and I have believed', or 'I've asked Jesus into my heart' - whatever that means. I'm not saying you can't do that, or it doesn't have an effect if you do it if you have true faith - but a lot of folk have these little cliches, and really there is no knowledge behind them as to what it actually means. Maybe it's just the whole idea of conversion, and you've turned from sin and you've turned to Jesus, but you don't really understand who you are now in the eyes of the Holy God. Maybe that's why the devil is pummelling you, maybe that's why he is getting one over on you in regards to his accusation of you, and why you are condemned under your sin - because you don't understand your position in the Lord Jesus Christ, who you are, and what He has accomplished for you, and what He says about you, and what He promises to come your way.

Now I don't want to spend too much time on this this morning, because it's a huge

subject in and of itself, and I want to encourage you to go away and look into it yourself. I want to recommend a book to you, a couple of books by Dr Neil Anderson in particular. One of them is called 'Victory Over Darkness', and another is called 'The Bondage Breaker' - and in them you will confront a lot of truth revolving around the whole issue of spiritual battle, and how we can stand in the strength of the Lord before the enemy. But what he does do within those books is, he emphasises who we are in Christ, our identity in Christ, how we are accepted when we are in Christ, how we are secure when we are in Christ, how we are significant when we are in Christ, and how these truths cancel out the lies of the enemy and those arrows that he fires against us. Remember we saw that Satan has a reciprocal armour that he comes against us with, which is the opposite of the armour of God. So if the belt of truth and faith is what we need to confound him, he will be sending lies our way, deceit our way, he will be accusing us in condemning us, telling us things about ourselves that aren't true.

What greater way to counteract his lies than to meditate upon who you are in Christ? To put on the helmet of salvation, to remind yourself of what Jesus says about you - things that Neil Anderson says, there's a little bookmark you can download off the Internet: 'I am accepted. I am God's child. I am Christ's friend. I have been justified. I'm united with the Lord, one spirit. I am bought with a price. I belong to God. I am a member of Christ's body. I am a saint. I have been adopted as God's child. I have access to God through the Holy Spirit. I have been redeemed and forgiven. I am complete in Christ' - and he gives the scriptures to each of those. I am accepted, who I am in Christ. Then he talks about being secure: 'I am free forever from condemnation. I am assured all works together for good because I love God. I am free from the charge against me. I cannot be separated from the Lord of love. I am established, anointed, sealed by God. I am hidden with Christ in God. I am confident that the good work God has begun in me, He will perfect. I am a citizen of heaven. I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and of a sound mind. I can find grace and mercy in time of need. I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me' - that's how I am secure. I am significant - do you feel significant today? Be honest: do you feel significant? 'I am salt and light of the earth. I am a branch of the True Vine, a channel of His life. I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit. I am a personal witness of Christ. I am God's temple. I am a minister of reconciliation for God. I am God's co-worker. I am sealed with Christ in the heavenly realm. I am God's workmanship. I may approach God with freedom and confidence. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'. He writes at the bottom of this: 'The more you reaffirm who you are in Christ, the more your behaviour will begin to reflect your true identity' - and that is such a truth. That is why Ephesians 1-3 tell us who we are, before telling us how we need to live and how we need to fight.

Here's a thing that Neil Anderson taught me years ago through his writings, and I never cease to be amazed at. We often live on a performance level in our Christian life, we're trying to be someone as a Christian, we're trying to get to a certain standard or a level of experience - but he well says: 'What we do does not determine who we are, who we are determines what we do'. We've got to put on this helmet of salvation and realise who we are, how secure we are, how significant we are in Jesus Christ - and boy, that will change us when we realise that we are sons and daughters of the King, and we have been delivered from darkness into light. Is that not wonderful? But do you know that? Is that what you're meditating on day by day? Remember this is the helmet of salvation, it's on the head, so it infers that these are truths that you are ruminating over day by day, and - just like the digestive system in the body, whatever

you put in becomes part of you - quite disconcerting when we think of some of the stuff we put in! When you eat stuff it becomes part of you, and as you digest these truths of who you are in Jesus and what He has done for you in this so great salvation, it becomes part of you and it strengthens you - it vitalises you and it becomes life, it becomes life!

Are you wearing the helmet of salvation today, or are you listening to what the enemy says about you? 'Ah, you're rubbish, you're no good, you're a failure, look at you! What have you ever done worthwhile for the Lord?'. Are you listening to him? Are you listening to yourself? Are you agreeing with him? Are you agreeing with him? Are you saying those things about yourself? Are you listening to what others have said about you, and how the enemy has spoken through others about you, and you have taken that upon yourself? I want you today - God wants you - to put on the helmet of deliverance, and be delivered by the truth of the knowledge of salvation. It's mighty!

It takes faith, it's faith that will actually make this happen. It's choosing to believe what God says about you, rather than what the devil says or what you would be tempted to think about yourself. It's faith that will engage that, it's just a choice. I think I have said to you before - and this is the struggle in the mental area of truth and lies - every single day of your life Satan will turn up at your front door like a postman with a parcel, and God will turn up, God the Holy Spirit will be there as well with another parcel. His parcel is filled with truth, Satan's is filled with lies - and it's all down to which you receive, which you decide to receive, which you open, which you start to dissect and enjoy. Now obviously you'll not enjoy the lies, but sometimes there's that bit of love-hate relationship, where we do derive a certain amount of sordid self-security through worry, through fear, through self-analysis, through introspection and perfectionism. It's a perverted thing, but we can feel that we are securing ourselves by worrying, by fearing, and listening to the lies of the enemy - rather than the rest of faith, whereby we let ourselves go in God, and we just secure ourselves and lean back in Him and the truths that He says about us.

Whose parcel did you receive today? Some have you have already opened the box of the devil, and you've been rummaging through what he has given to you today. Dump it out! Dump it out now, and take God's box - and in it there is a helmet, and it's all the knowledge of what Jesus has done for you, and who you are and what you have in Jesus Christ - that's what you need to think about! That's what you need to think about! Philippians chapter 4 verse 8: 'Finally brothers, whatsoever is true, think on these things'. Remember I said that worry is meditating on lies? Well, you need to start putting on the helmet of salvation, and meditating on what Jesus has done for you, and who you are in Christ.

So it takes faith to put on the helmet of salvation. Now let me just - there's another point I want to leave with you, but we'll put it to the side just for a few moments - because what I want to focus on just now is the area over which this helmet is. We've emphasised the issue of salvation, and who we are in Christ and so on, but what I want to just spend a moment or two on - and we've touched on it several times - but it's how the chief battleground of the enemy in our lives is the mind. The devil, from the very beginning, Genesis chapter 3, has always attacked via the mind. When you look at the Garden of Eden incident, and you've got Adam and Eve, and the enemy comes, the serpent subtly comes in - and how does he attack? Now this is very interesting: there was a lie planted in Eve's head, before sin was conceived in her

heart. Think about that.

There are a few lessons we can derive from that. One is that a bad thought coming into your mind is not necessarily sin, it's what we do with that bad thought. Now if you have conjured that thought up from your heart, that's a different thing, if it's evil that is coming out of your heart - but if it's a thought that the enemy has planted into your mind, that's not necessarily something that you need to be guilty about. That can release some of us, because if you're honest there are thoughts that can just pop into your mind out of nowhere - you know what I'm talking about. Not things that you in your own sinful flesh could conjure up, and would be drawn to - we all know about that, temptations, and passions, and lusts that we would naturally be drawn to - but there are things that can come like the dart that they are, just out of nowhere, into our minds; and we think, 'Where did that come from?'. One of the biggest dangers in spiritual warfare is to attribute that thought to yourself. Now I'm not letting you off the hook, I'm not saying that you're a wonderful person and you would never think anything bad - I'm not saying that. Jesus said: 'Out of the heart proceed all sorts of wicked things' - so we know what our hearts have the potential to do. But there are things that come into our mind, the Bible is clear, darts that the enemy sends our way, that don't originate in us. If we should attribute those to ourselves, we will be joining him in doing his job of accusing us and condemning us, when it's not even us that has done it.

Now this should be a liberating word to some of you here today - because I feel, if you're normal like me, I tend to think I'm normal, but in this regard I think this is normal: Satan puts stuff in your head - that is normal. Please tell me that is normal, because he does that to me! That's normal, it's not coming from inside, it's coming from outside in - and if I should start to think that it's coming from me, I'll be in diff's. Now you might say: 'I don't know if what you're saying is true here'. Well, come with me to Matthew chapter 16. We will take a wee bit of time to tease this out, Matthew 16. Here's Peter and the Lord Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, in verse 13: 'He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'. Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'".

Now let's pause just for a moment: do you think that Simon one moment was just sort of laissez-faire kind of relaxed, listening to this interesting question that Jesus was asking, and then all of a sudden it was like an electric shock, and a bolt of lightning came out of heaven and all of a sudden he started speaking like a robot: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'? Because that's the way a lot of people conceive of God speaking through people. A lot of people have this idea that there was this angelic dictaphone that sprung down from heaven to the apostle's who wrote the scriptures, and they just sort of verbatim wrote word for word everything that God would put in their ear. That's not the way the Bible was written - they were moved, holy men moved by inspiration of the Holy Spirit - but they wrote, and that's why you see their characteristics coming through in each of the epistles and the Gospels, their own personalities. God is able to move through human personalities, because He created the human personality, He is a personality Himself - and so He can use it. The wonderful thing is that because we're all different in personalities - those of us who are sure we've got a personality - because we are all different, you get the full-orbed worth of the great God of personality coming through, through the scriptures and

through humanity in the expression of His kingdom. Wonderful, isn't it?

So let me put it another way: obviously Peter wasn't taken over and controlled when he spoke this, and yet here we see Jesus in verse 17 says to Simon: 'Blessed are you, Simon BarJonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven' - what? 'Peter, this thought did not come from you', that's what Jesus is saying, this thought did not come from you. Now let me ask you: do you think Peter thought that this thought came from him? Do you think he thought it came from him? Yes, and he probably thought: 'Yes! I got it right!' - tick! You know the way Peter always liked to jump in. Let me ask you another question: do you think his cognitive faculties - that's his mind working - were engaged? So he wasn't cancelled out, he wasn't some kind of robot or medium, so his mind was engaged - was his mouth engaged? We know sometimes with Peter that his mouth was engaged before the mind was engaged, a bit like ourselves - but did he actually open his mouth and speak? Yes, he did. But what did Jesus say: 'Peter, that thought did not come from you'.

Now that is very instructive, because that shows us that sometimes - now please listen to what I'm saying - one of the biggest obstacles to the supernatural in the Christian's life and in the church is the desire for the spectacular. Let me repeat that: one of the greatest obstacles to the supernatural in the life of the Christian and in the church is the desire for the spectacular. We always expect when God is doing something supernatural, that it will be out of this world - but our conception of 'out of this world', well, it sometimes excludes the very natural, or what appears to be very natural. Now please, this is important: God can speak to you and speak through you, and you hardly even know it. You will come to learn it, you will come to learn it as you walk with God and get to know God - but you need to understand: don't be waiting for some neon blue sign flashing on your consciousness. We treat God like a proverbial satnav, where we're listening to Him to say, 'Go left at the next junction, and turn right at the next roundabout'. In a mechanical way, we seek God, when God is known relationally. Isn't it wonderful to think that God can speak through our thoughts, through our processes - but sometimes we don't even realise that He's doing it.

So, did this thought come from Peter? No. Where did it come from? God. Follow down with me, let's skip a few verses down to verse 21: 'From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!'. But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'. OK? Same fellow, Peter, same place, same scene, same scenario. Now, let me ask you again: where did this thought come from? Where did it come from? Satan. Did Peter engage his mind? Did he come under the powers of darkness, was he taken over? Do we hear another voice coming from his mouth? Now, let me tell you, that happens - but did it happen here? Is that the only way that Satan can speak through people? No, far from it. Yet his thought process was engaged, and I would say in this instance his heart was very much engaged, and it was with a love for Jesus - it was with welfare for Jesus not dying. So you can have a love for Jesus in your heart, and speak the devil's words with your mouth! It was a misplaced love - that's interesting.

But who does Jesus address? Does Jesus say: 'Peter, you really take me to the fair, you're always jumping in - Peter, use your head! Do you not remember anything that

I've been telling you?' - is that what Jesus said? Who did Jesus address? Because we wrestle not with flesh and blood, we wrestle with the powers behind flesh and blood - and that's liberating as well for some of you, because some of you at the moment are struggling with Christians. Christians who are difficult, or who have been difficult for you - but the danger is that you're missing what is going on. You're seeing the person and not seeing the principality or the power that is behind them. Do you understand? Therefore, you can fall into sin, and you can start sinning against that person - even if it's only in your own heart - because you don't realise that they are being used.

But what I want you to see this morning is that the mind, the mind is the battleground from the enemy. In one moment the mind is receiving communications from heaven, and God is revealing something to Peter, and the next moment - the next moment! - Satan is revealing something to Peter, and speaking out of his mouth! It really bamboozles me that Christians don't believe that the devil can do anything to Christians, that he can't speak through them, and he can't be on them or even in them. Peter is a classic case, but equally so: if Peter had attributed that thought to himself, he would have been in trouble - but Jesus was pointing out where it came from. So I want you to understand: I'm not saying you're morally or spiritually neutral, that's not what I'm saying - but I want you to understand that the battle that is going on in your mind, the battle that's going on in your mind can be energised by the forces of darkness. Many of the thoughts that have gripped you, and the strongholds that have exalted themselves, the arguments against the knowledge of God in your mind, are not necessarily from you. You may have cooperated with them, you may have agreed with them, but you have got to understand where they come from - because that's half the battle: understanding where the source of the problem derives.

If you imagine a human being as a castle, John Bunyan wrote a book about this called 'The Holy War', incidentally. He talked about the forces of Diabolus, that's the devil, the forces of Diabolus coming against the city of Mansoul. If you imagine the castle of your life as a citadel, and your spirit and your soul, and even your body, and the devil wants you. Remember I told you last week that he just wants to destroy you, he's going about like a roaring lion seeking to devour you. You imagine the forces of the devil coming against this castle which is your life, the battleground that is at the fore of the castle, at the front of the castle, where the battle for Mansoul is fought - that battleground is the mind. If the devil can conquer the mind, he has conquered the soul. If he can get into your mind, he will take your head off! That's probably why - maybe this is too simplistic a statement - but it's probably why Christians grapple with problems of the mind more than most other problems, because the enemy wants to get in on the mind.

I want you to be liberated - first of all, before we talk about remedies, I want you to be liberated by knowing that a lot of these thoughts that have come against you are not coming from your heart. Some of them might be, and you know your own heart, but understand what the enemy is wanting to do in your mind. Don't come under condemnation - that's part of winning the battle, to know that you are the battleground on which it is being fought. Listen please to this principle: don't you start trying to fight, don't you start trying to fight in the flesh against the enemy. You say: 'You're confusing me!'. Come with me to Galatians 5, the thoughts aren't always coming from you, but you're the battleground - your mind is the battleground. Look at Galatians 5:17, verse 16 says: 'Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh'. This is now talking about the fleshly, fallen, sinful nature: 'For the flesh

lusts', I think the NIV puts it 'desires what is contrary to the Spirit', that's the Holy Spirit, 'and the Holy Spirit', lusts, or desires what is contrary to 'the flesh'; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish'.

Now I would not be fit to give an English lesson this morning, there are others who would - but very basic, and I'll not get the terminology right but forgive me - you look at this verse and you will see that there are a number of individuals. Let's personify them, OK? There is the flesh, imagine the flesh as a person. There is the Spirit, who is the Holy Spirit. Then at the end of the verse, these - the flesh and the Spirit - are contrary to one another, so that you - there's another person. Who is the other person? You - but often you think of yourself as that sinful, fallen nature, don't you? So many Christians have identified themselves so much with that sinful, fallen nature, that they can't get that sinful, fallen nature off their back - because they understand that to be who they are, they understand that to be the way their heart is. The Bible clearly says in the New Testament that that is not who you are any more, that old nature has been crucified with Christ, and that is not your heart - you have been given a new heart. Now listen - I'm not saying that we're not depraved, and we're not fallen - we are, through Adam; but in Christ we are made new. We are to put the old off, and put the new on; and we have been given new hearts in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you continually see yourself as having a bad heart, and a bad nature, and identifying yourself in your essence with that fallen, sinful nature, you'll never overcome sin - because you're saying, 'That's who I am'.

Look at this verse: you're not the sinful nature, you're the battleground - OK? You're the battleground, whether it's your mind or your actual being, whether it's sinful thoughts that the devil shoots like arrows into your head, or whether it's the old nature that he can set alight very easily - you are the battleground, who is fighting the battle? Sin, Satan, and the Holy Spirit. Do you know what you need to do? Don't you butt in! You let the Holy Spirit fight the battle for you. You die, you surrender to His influence, and you let Him win the war. You say: 'Well, that's sort of semantics - it's just terminology. It sounds clever, and you're splitting hairs and all, but what does that really mean?'. Well, I have never surfed - you would know that to look at me - but I'm told that the essence of surfing is when you see the big wave, get on the board if you can balance, but go with the wave - just go with the wave, become one with the wave. That's what you need to do: you're the battleground, but you need to go with the Holy Spirit. You need to go with the force of power that He promises will be behind you, and you need to trust Him, and you need to go with that, and He will win the war. He will win the war of the mind, and He will win the war of the heart.

But, you see, you might have attributed to yourself such wickedness that you can't get over sin. You're not embracing who you are in Christ, and who God has made you, and the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation - that's not what is at the forefront of your mind. You're listening to the condemnation of the enemy, and you're not listening to what God says you are now in Christ, and what you have in Him. Do you see it?

But let's finally come to this area. We said that you've got to engage by faith the helmet of salvation, what Christ has done for you - that's the evidence of things not seen: believing, knowing who you are. But there's one other thing that is vital to make this really experiential, to make a difference in your life - it's found in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 8, I want you to turn with me there. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:8: 'Let us

who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love' - and we noted how this breastplate of righteousness is known as faith and love - 'and as a helmet the hope of salvation', the hope of salvation. So this helmet of salvation, or helmet of deliverance, is a helmet of hope. Now listen: if faith is engaging by believing and accepting the truth of what God has said, what is hope? Christians talk about hope, and the half of them don't know what hope is. I mean, what is hope? Is it: 'I hope, that I hope, that I hope' - is that it? Wishful thinking? That's not Christian hope, Christian hope is described as a certainty, it's described as an anchor for the soul. What is it? Listen: it is anticipation, it is a secure and absolute assurance in anticipation.

What this means is that you are living today in the good of what you're hoping for and believing for tomorrow, but hope is the actual anticipation. It's the connection with something that hasn't happened yet in the future, but you're living in the good of it now. Now listen: this helmet of salvation or deliverance is a helmet of hope, and that means it counteracts the armour of Satan, who uses the weapon of hopelessness and despair. Who is wearing that hat today? Hopelessness, 'Oh, this is hopeless, this is never going to end, this is never going to change, the tide is never going to turn. This mountain will never move!' - that's hopelessness, despair, and you just want to give up, and you just want to throw the towel in.

This is a helmet of hope, and maybe you have a deliverance issue in your own life, or in the life of a loved one or a friend, and you're starting to get hopeless about it - put on the helmet of hope. Can I say something else to you, I'm almost finished: God has designed us, spirit, soul, and body - I've told you that before - and the spirit is the part of us that He wants to influence the rest of the human being through. By the animation of the Holy Spirit upon our spirits, He wants to influence our soul - made up of the mind, the emotion, and the will - and through that He wants to influence the body, so that our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. Now listen carefully: the way that the spirit, our spirit, animated by the Holy Spirit, affects our emotions - do you want to bring the Holy Spirit's influence on your emotions? Do you? Who would like that, the Holy Spirit's influence on your emotions? The means, the instrument whereby we can control our emotions, by our human spirit, is using hope - hope, the anticipation of what God is going to do.

The psalmist said, it's in Psalm 3 verse 3: 'Thou, O GOD are a shield for me, my glory and the Lifter up of my head'. Who needs their head lifted up this morning? God is the Lifter up of our head, He's the One who gives us hope. Don't despair! Put on this helmet, tell yourself who you are in Christ! You need to talk to yourself - that's not the first sign of insanity, far from it - Psalm 42, David said: 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God!' - he was talking to himself. That was his spirit talking to his soul, that was his spirit talking to his soul: 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God, for you shall yet praise Him, and He will be the help of your countenance!'

You have to do that, you know. Are you just sitting passively, expecting God to come along and zap you - that isn't going to be the way it is always. Sometimes He does that, quite rarely, but He has given us the resources to speak to our soul. He has given us the hope in Christ as a helmet of deliverance. So put away forever now, put away forever hopelessness and despair! God forbid, there are even believers who are contemplating taking their own lives, because they don't feel there is any hope.

Let me leave you with a verse, one verse as a promise and as a benediction of our message - Romans 15 - and I want to leave this with you, and tonight God willing we will look at the sword of the Spirit, and the secret weapon, if we have time - you can think about that one! The secret weapon. I might give a prize tonight to anybody who guesses it! There's hope, an incentive! Romans 15 and verse 13: 'Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing', you see the connection here - your believing leads to a hopeful anticipation that comes from God. 'Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy', that's the fruit of the hope, joy, 'and peace', peace of mind, peace of heart, 'in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'.

Spiritual Warfare - Chapter 6

"The Sword Of The Spirit and Our Secret Weapon"

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It's good to be with you again, hard to believe that the three weeks have gone in so quickly - but they have. Maybe you're glad they've gone in quickly! But it has been good to be with you, and just to share together in this series that we've been doing on 'Spiritual Warfare', looking at the armour of God. Now I offered a prize to anyone - we're going to look tonight at the sword of the Spirit, but we're also going to look at a secret weapon. Now, I forgot the prize! Alright? That's genuine, I did forget, I did mean to bring something - and I was sitting down their thinking, 'I've forgotten the prize'. What I do have is, I have a TicTac - it has been in the pocket with my hanky, but if you're so desperate for a prize, you can have it! I've got another one - so I'll keep that for you if you can get the answer right. What's the secret weapon? Does anybody know what the secret weapon is? Do you really want it? Do you want the TicTac, do you? Yes, prayer!

Now if you read the commentaries, you might find a disparity with this - but there is usually a pattern throughout the Bible of sevens, and I have a hunch that the armour of God here doesn't finish with the sword of the Spirit, number six piece of armour. In all likelihood, I think there's a seventh, and the seventh is prayer. But let's read the whole passage together, Ephesians 6 beginning to read at verse 10: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour 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 armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God",* and here's number seven, *"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints".* Amen.

Let's pray together, let's come before the Lord - and I do invite you, please, to ask the Lord to speak to you now, would you do that? We really want to meet with the Lord, we had a very special time this morning, and we want the Lord to come again to us and be very close, and speak right into the depths of our souls. What's your need tonight? What battle do you find yourself in? Come and bring it before the Lord, open your heart to Him, and ask Him to speak to you tonight.

Blessed God, Holy and Victorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we reverence You - holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. We come through the Lord Jesus Christ to

the Throne of Grace, to our Abba Father. We thank You that through the instrumentality, the power of the Holy Spirit, we come right into heaven just now in the Spirit, and we worship at Your feet, our great God. We bless Your name, Your thrice holy name. Lord, we come to You for this moment, and Lord we need You. We've been looking at these wonderful truths and, Lord, we thank You for the help that has been given thus far - but we ask tonight that You will come again to us, that You will come in a very special way, and that You will crown this whole series of meetings with a very definite sense of Your presence and Your power upon us. Lord, we pray that You will communicate revelation to our hearts individually, and even for this fellowship of God's people - and for those who don't belong here, but who are on a spiritual journey themselves that we are all on, Lord, right for where they are at this moment in their particular need, we pray that there would be a word from the Lord. Lord, we need to hear from You, so we pray now, Lord, that our ears would be cupped, as it were, to hear Your still small voice from the courtrooms of heaven right into the depths of our hearts. We take authority in the name of the Lord Jesus over every ungodly empowerment, spirit, or demonic entity that would seek to distract from this gathering, and would seek to disrupt the work of God. We bind it now in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus, we take over us afresh the covering of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask, Father, that Your kingdom, Your domain and authority would come to rest upon our gathering tonight - and that Your will will be done now here, as it is being done presently in heaven. May this be a colony of heaven, we pray. May there be, as it were, heavenly portal above our heads open, that there would be direct communication from heaven to here - that the angels, as it were, would ascend and descend upon us as Your glory rests in this place. So, Lord, we look to You, and we wait for You. In the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Verse 17 then. We dealt with the helmet of salvation, and now we're looking at the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Now, of course, I've said to you many times now that Paul obviously appears to have envisaged the typical Roman soldier as he is writing here, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We have covered the soldier's armour so far, and tried to bring out of the analogies of what was peculiar to the Roman warrior the lessons that the Holy Spirit wants to teach us. The sword of the Spirit is no exception in that regard. Now often when we think of a sword that a soldier might wield, we think of a broadsword. Again, we are so influenced by films in our day and age, and maybe it's what Braveheart would have wielded around - a big double broadsword. But that is not what is being spoken of here. Soldiers would have used this, but it appears that what is being spoken of here - it is a two-edged sword, but it's a short cut-and-thrust sword. It would have been wielded by a heavily armoured legionary, and it's quite distinct from the large broadsword that we might be more familiar with. He may well have had an armoury, a variety of these weapons, and he chose them according to what type of warfare he was engaging in.

Now that's very instructive. Do you remember Peter? We were with him this morning - Peter seems to crop up quite a lot when we're talking about spiritual truths. Remember Peter tried to defend the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane by a physical sword. Well, this spiritual sword is what Peter, after his conversion - and I don't mean coming to know Christ, but remember the Lord Jesus said: 'When you are converted', and he had that burnout and breakdown spiritually, and then the Lord turned him around, at Pentecost in particular, when he got filled with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, rather than overcompensating in the flesh for self-deficiency and insecurity. When he

got the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we see that he wielded the sword of the Spirit far better than he wielded the physical sword in defence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A physical sword pierces the body, but the sword of the Spirit pierces the soul, or the heart. Now let me show you this - and some of you have heard me recently on this, I apologise for that, but it will bear repeating. If you turn to Hebrews chapter 4 for a moment, verse 12, a wonderful verse about the word of God: 'For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart'. This is very instructive, and we haven't got time to go into everything that is here, but right away we see that the word of God has this power because it's alive. I was told the story years ago about an old open-air preacher who used to preach at the Customs House steps in the city of Belfast years and years ago, and he used to gather a great crowd. He would have a bowler hat, and his bowler hat was sitting in the middle of the crowd - and this is how he gathered a group around him. He would shout: 'It's alive! It's alive! It's alive!', and everybody would start to crowd around - and then when he lifted the bowler hat, there was a copy of the Bible underneath it. That's the truth of Hebrews 4:12: this is a living word, the Bible is a living book. The word of God has life inherent within it. One of the favourite magazines that I read, and I don't read an awful lot of missionary magazines that come in, it's virtually impossible - but one of my favourites is the Gideons. I love to read how the word of God, whether it's in a prison cell or in a hotel room, it is alive! Now that doesn't mean that we don't go out and preach, but it does mean that there is something within the word of God, inherently built into it, it lives and it can quicken in and of itself.

It is double-edged, sharp, it is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart - that's a huge subject. You see, if I look at you and I see you coming into meetings, or I see you teaching a Sunday School class, or I see you up in a pulpit, or myself for that matter, standing in a pulpit preaching, serving the Lord - there's one thing that I cannot do: I cannot judge your motives. But can I tell you something: that is the very thing that God is going to judge - did you know that? That's why you shouldn't judge me, and I shouldn't judge you - that's why the apostle says, 'Judge nothing before that day', because none of us can discern the intentions and the thoughts of one another's hearts. Now we can discern, and it's not that we are to walk around like dummies and not be able to tell right from wrong or anything like that, I'm not saying that. But what we cannot judge are the thoughts and intents of the heart, but the word of God can - and that's why, when you get Holy Spirit anointed preaching, it is incisive, it's not condemning, it's not destructive, it's both edifying and convicting at the same time, it pulls down in conviction but it builds up in edification - but it's uncomfortable. That's why it perturbs me sometimes when I preach maybe quite a hot sermon, and people say: 'I really enjoyed that, that was fantastic' - and I'm thinking 'Oh? That's interesting'. It's meant to pierce deep down in convicting our motives, something that no one else can do - because it's somewhere that nobody else can reach, our motivation. Sometimes we are so self-deceived that we don't even know our own motivation, we are not even aware of it, and it takes us to be so open to the word of God, the Spirit moving in the word, to actually ask: 'Is this speaking to me?', to be willing to be vulnerable and humble. That's why James says: 'Receive with meekness the engrafted word of truth'.

We've got to be submissive and bow before the word, because we could be ignorant of areas of motivation that are wrong. If you look at this analogy that is given here in Hebrews 4, this two-edged sword of the word of God pierces even to the division of soul and spirit. This is one of the verses that we believe would be evidence to show that the soul and the spirit are distinct. Now we have to be careful about carving the human being up into pieces, you can't do that - we are one unity, but there are facets to us, and there seems to be a slight distinction between the spirit and the soul. As I've said to you before, the spirit is that God-conscious part of us that God breathed into us; the soul is the self-conscious part made of the mind, the emotions, and the will; and of course the body is the world-conscious part. But sometimes even in Scripture it is hard to tell between the spirit and the soul, but the word of God is able, with surgical precision, to dissect down between them, the middle of both, to separate soul and spirit. Just like it's very hard to distinguish between bone and marrow, they really are two parts of the one thing - isn't that right? But they are different.

Incidentally, and I think this is hinted here, I think soul is being likened to the joints, and spirit is being likened to the marrow in the order here: 'a twoedged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow'. Your identity is found in your spirit, that's who you really are - not in your soul, but in your spirit. Your soul expresses who you are, your mind expresses your thoughts, your heart expresses your feelings, your will expresses actions. Your spirit is who you really are, the real you; your soul expresses who you are - just like spirit is like marrow, that's the life of the bone, but it's the joints that express the life. Have you got it? It's very instructive, isn't it? How the word of God is so piercing, it either convicts and converts, or it condemns if we disobey.

I think we have lost faith in the word of God, and the power of the word of God. Probably that's because it hasn't been preached with power, and we've got to say that it has to be preached with power - there is an inherent power in it, as I've said, I'm not contradicting myself, but God's intention was not really that the word of God should be left littered about the place, hoping that people pick it up and read it. God can do stuff like that, because God is not bound - but God's chief desire was that that word should be preached in power, for the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. Paul says: 'The Gospel came to you Thessalonians not in word only, but in demonstration of power and of the Holy Spirit'. Maybe that's why we've lost faith in the word of God, because we've listened so long to such dead preaching.

The mighty thing is that a physical sword wears out with use, but the spiritual sword just grows sharper and sharper, cutting both ways - because it's the word of Christ! In Revelation 19 verse 15 we read of this glorious figure of the Lord Jesus Christ returning in glory one day to this earth, and out of His mouth is proceeding a two-edged sword - but that two-edged sword that is seen in vision of the resurrected, ascended Lord Jesus coming in glory, that sword out of His mouth is now meant to be in our hands. This is the sword that He gives us. In fact the psalmist spoke of that in Psalm 149 verse 6: 'Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand' - that's where the sword is meant to be now, presently, in the hand of the saints as we praise our God in victory for what Jesus has done for us, and as we fight the enemy in heavenly places.

Now what is this sword? 'Well', you say, 'It's the Bible'. Well, I've been hinting at that, but I think I would rather say the Bible is the armoury - remember we talked about

these small, short cut-and-thrust swords? Well, the Bible is just an armoury full of daggers like that, but the Bible itself is not this sword. That might shock some of you, or change how you have previously understood this. Look at what Ephesians 6 actually says this sword is, verse 17: 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'. 'There you have it', you say, 'there it is, it's the Bible'. Well, that could be translated, 'the word of God', as 'the utterance of God'. Some of you will be familiar with John chapter 1, which says: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God', and you may know that the Greek word that is used for 'Word' there is the word 'Logos', 'In the beginning was the Logos'. 'Logos' just expresses that Jesus, that's who it speaking of, is the expression of the mind and the heart of God, just as our words are the expression of our thoughts and our feelings. Jesus is the express image of God's person - so if you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus. Wonderful, isn't it?

But that's not the word used for 'word' in Ephesians 6:17, the word used here is 'rhema'. It speaks of the utterance of God, or the spoken word of God. So the sword of the Spirit is not the Bible, as such, as a book from Genesis to Revelation, the sword of the Spirit is the spoken word of God - a specific word that God speaks at a specific time for a specific person or group of people. It is literally a saying of God, or the words that come from God. Now what this means in the battle is: Satan is defeated when we speak the word of God - at a very elementary level that's what it means. It means we need to use Scripture to drive Satan away, the sword of the Spirit against the enemy. That means that there will be appropriate scriptures for appropriate circumstances that we need to use.

A case in point is the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 4 in His temptation in the wilderness. Three times He is tempted, and - you look at it - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, just the way all of us are tempted, in those three general areas Jesus was tempted. Three times He says back to Satan: 'It is written, it is written, it is written' - three times. This is Jesus, He is the Living Word of God, so if He wanted He just could have come up with something there and then and spoke it, but He didn't. He chose to quote Scripture - does anybody know the book of the Bible that He quoted from? He quoted from the same book three times - I have another TicTac! Deuteronomy, that's right! You're not getting that one, that's for me afterwards! Deuteronomy - how many of us have memorised the book of Deuteronomy? Not many, I imagine, but the Lord Jesus had hidden God's word in His heart, that when temptation to sin came - now I'm not suggesting that He was peccable in some way, that He could have sinned, but it was real temptation! The psalmist says: 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee' - and Jesus, as a young Jewish boy, had memorised, as they all did, the Torah. He had Deuteronomy in His heart, and it came out when He needed it. It's just basic computers - input/output. If you want the sword of the Spirit to be taken by the Holy Spirit, and to use a specific dagger for a specific battle, you need to put the word of God in your heart so that the Spirit of God can bring it out.

Now don't misunderstand me, I have known the Spirit of God to bring out verses that I never put in - and I have known other people that that has happened to. Verses that I hadn't memorised, but He brings out the truth. Maybe I had read it in the past - I'm not binding God, but generally speaking, you need to put it in if you want the Holy Spirit to bring it out when it's needed. You see, this is not the whole Bible. You see the outcome in the wilderness with the Lord Jesus, we read in Luke 4:4: 'Then the devil

left Him'. Can I say to you: you need to use the sword of the Spirit against the devil in temptation, and so you need to acquaint yourself with your weapon. There are no shortcuts to getting to know the word of God. I don't want to sound negative, but I just have to say things as I feel led to - but I do get a little discouraged as I move around. I know we live in a technological age, and I know if you're looking on your iPhone or whatever you're not texting - I hope you're not! - but you're looking up the Bible. It took me awhile to work that one out, I was ready to light on people sitting on their phones, thinking they were gossiping or something, 'This preacher is long and boring', or something! I know all that, but it does discourage me a little that people aren't familiar with their Bibles - people maybe don't have a hard copy. Get a hard copy of the word of God. If your phone just shows you where a book in the Bible is, you're not going to learn where the book of the Bible is. There is something about becoming familiar with chapters and verses, and even where the verses are with one copy of the word of God. I'm not against technology, I could hardly survive without it myself now - but people aren't bringing Bibles even to worship now. We need to get familiar with the Bible. If we were living in a land where the Bible was banned, we would value the Bible. I've heard some heartbreaking stories of Chinese believers, and other believers in lands where the church is persecuted, and how they have maybe ten little excerpts of Scripture on pieces of paper, or even written on stones, and they circulate the stones around the fellowship, and they sleep with that stone under their pillow, or they keep the little piece of paper in their pocket day by day, and they meditate upon it over and over. Wait till I tell you: they maybe only have ten bits of Bible, but they know it inside out by the end of the week, and they live off it. We have maybe ten Bibles sitting on our shelf! We need to get familiar with the word of God.

The devil leaves Him in His temptation - and that's what will happen to us if we submit ourselves to God, resist the devil with the word of God, and he will flee from us. But I believe it's important to speak the word of God - this is the spoken word of God, the rhema word of God. Now this morning I said about it not being insanity to speak to yourself, and I was correct biblically speaking - for the psalmist said in Psalm 42: 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God, for you will yet praise Him'. That was his spirit speaking to his soul, through his mind, his emotion, and his will - but you know, you also are authorised, I believe, to speak to the enemy, to resist the enemy. I would say that you should speak to him out loud. You say: 'People are really going to think I'm nuts now! I'm talking to myself and now I'm talking to nothing' - it's not nothing, he is invisible, but he is not nothing. I'm not suggesting you do it in the queue in Tesco's. I'm not suggesting you do it in school, in the classroom, or anything like that. I'm not suggesting you even have to shout - everybody has got this idea that God is deaf, or the devil is deaf - in spiritual things you don't have to shout. Even the spirit of deafness is not deaf, did you know that? You just need to speak, it can even be a whisper.

You say: 'Well, why do you need to speak?'. Well there is a biblical significance in speaking, confession is always with the mouth - with the heart man believes, but confession is with the mouth. But another reason for speaking for the benefit of the devil is - you don't need to speak for God's benefit, He is the discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. We read that, I know it's about the word of God, but it's about Him - but the devil, you will be glad to know, is not God. You must never attribute to the devil, as some people do, some of the attributes of God - one of which is omniscience, knowing everything. The devil doesn't know what you're thinking, unless he's got into your head, which he has done with some people - but if he hasn't

got into your head, he doesn't know what you're thinking, he doesn't know what your heart is feeling. What he can do, as I've said before: he has been studying humankind for millennia, and so - I mean, if you're biting your nails, I can read that you're nervous. If you're jiggling your leg, I know that you're nervous - what do you think he knows? He can read you, and he can plant things in your mind whenever he knows you're vulnerable, but he can't read your mind. So if you say: 'I resist you, Satan', in your head or in your heart - he doesn't hear it! Then these thoughts continue to overcome you - you need to speak it out. Jesus spoke it out, didn't He?

I don't know what it was like in the wilderness, for Jesus I mean. We have these great portraits, some of the greatest artists have portrayed it - and you've got the devil sitting there, and he's an ugly looking thing, an ogre, or he's got horns and a tail. All sorts of weird and wonderful depictions of the devil out in the wilderness, and Jesus - and we've seen it in films trying to be portrayed. But I reckon if you, right now, if you could have a web connection to the wilderness, and you could watch it on a screen now what was happening - I believe you wouldn't see anybody only Jesus. I believe it was probably in the spirit, it was a spiritual thing, it was a spiritual battle. If you had sound you'd be hearing Jesus say: 'It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'. You'd be looking, and thinking: 'Who is He talking to?' - right?

Incidentally that verse that He quoted, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' - did He say, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by the word of God'? Is that what He said? 'But by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' - that's the spoken word, that's what you're meant to live on. I have to say to you that this is where many fall down in the spiritual walk and in the battle - the old chorus, 'Read your Bible, pray everyday, if you want to grow', it's just not entirely true. There have been people reading their Bible and praying everyday, and they haven't grown in a long long time. The Pharisees read their Bible and prayed every day, I imagine - did they grow? The early believers didn't have Bibles, apart from the Old Testament of course - but they didn't have a New Testament. Did they grow? Boy, did they grow, they turned the world upside down! How did they grow? By the spoken word of God. God spoke - now we'll not get into it this evening, but He spoke in miraculous ways, I believe He still speaks. He speaks primarily through the Scriptures of course, and no other way that is God speaking will contradict what He's already said in the Scriptures - but I'll tell you this much: you will not grow as a Christian if you're not hearing the proceeding word of God from God's mouth. If you're reading the Bible, but not hearing God, you will not grow. It's the proceeding word of God that makes the difference, that feeds you, you need it more than your daily bread - the proceeding word of God.

Do you know what I'm talking about? I'm not talking about reading your chapter and ticking it off, and saying, 'What a good boy I am'. I'm talking about - whether it's a big chunk, or probably little chunks lend themselves more to this, although I would advocate reading and knowing the whole Bible - but when you're looking for a word from God, and you've got an issue in your life, or a need for instruction or direction, or you just want to know what God thinks about you and feels about you; it's a relationship we are in, so we need to talk, we need to communicate. You're wanting a communication from God, and you're reading a passage, and all of a sudden a verse just comes to you as yours, and speaks directly into your life - that is a rhema word of God. You can hear it when somebody is preaching. I personally believe the gifts of the

Spirit are still in the church. You have to be very careful now of people coming to you and saying: 'I've got a word from God for you' - you have to be careful of that. I'm not saying people can't have, and people can't speak into your life - but, generally speaking, if something like that does happen, and it is from God, you will already know before they have spoken, and it will be a confirmation of what God has already told you. We have to test the spirits, we have to be very careful not to come into bondage to other people. If you have an anointing from the Holy One, you don't need anybody to teach you really. If you walk with God, He will teach you, He will tell you all you need - although the body, He still uses it to instruct us and to help us, and to make us rely upon others in humility. What I'm saying is: God is speaking! The psalmist says: 'His thoughts toward us are more than can be numbered' - that means that if your antenna is tuned into God, there will be so many messages coming from heaven to you that you will be overwhelmed. Isn't that amazing? That's what keeps you going, that's what keeps you going - not the 120th exposition of the book of Revelation, or the feasts in Leviticus. Thank God for studying the word, but what I'm saying is: we need a word, a rhema word from God to our hearts.

Can I say that that is what we need in preaching. One of the verses that we often hear quoted ad nauseam in prayer meetings, evangelical prayer meetings, is Isaiah 55: 'My word shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' We claim it: 'Lord, bless Your word tonight, and there will be fruit tonight' - and there is no fruit, and we all go out depressed. Maybe I'm being too harsh, but in my experience there has not been return for every time the word goes forth - but that verse is misquoted. You look at it, it says: 'My word that proceeds out of My mouth shall not return unto Me void, but shall accomplish what I have sent it for'. So that means that whenever God speaks a direct word into a specific situation, it never returns fruitless - that's not every time a sermon is preached, that there is fruit, because that doesn't happen. It's about time we wised up to that one, and looked around us and realised that that isn't happening. We'd be in revival! There are texts everywhere - is that what that means?

We need God to speak, we need to hear God, we need the sword of the Spirit. I'm trying to influence you now, aren't I, through words. I can't get into your head really, literally, but through my speech and communication I am in a sense getting into your head. That's what the enemy wants to do - we saw that this morning with the helmet of salvation - and that's what God wants to do. He's speaking something to you, and He wants you to speak something out to the enemy. Where are you at this very time? Where are you in the battle? Where is your journey with God? You're in a transition, you're at a crossroads, and you need a word from God - well, don't go and buy a promise box. Just a wee bit of advice, don't do that - I'm not against getting wee verses here and there, but go and seek God. Go and seek God, and ask Him to speak to you! Don't play Bible roulette, and stick the tail on the donkey - I'm not saying God can't use that, He has done - but that's not really advisable. Go and seek God and get Him to speak to you. Then when you get that verse, test it. Say: 'Lord, is this what You're saying?', and be sure. That's what the early disciples did and the apostles: they tested the spirits to see whether things were of God, they weighed even words of prophecy. They weren't allowed to quench the Spirit, but they weren't allowed to run away with everything that everybody said. No, they had to test it, prove that which is good, keep what is good and get rid of what is evil. You need to test it, and then you need to act upon what God is saying into your life.

You know what the sword of the Spirit is now: is it the Bible? No, not the Bible per se, you don't throw the book at the devil. Is it any verse in the Bible? Well, any verse in the Bible potentially could be one of those daggers, but it's whatever the Spirit takes out of the sheath of armoury for that specific moment in your battle, and you need to know what that is in the battle. You need to seek God, whether it's in a fellowship, you need to be listening for the voice of God. God deliver us from any more sermons, I mean any more just sermons. I mean, I don't want to preach any more, I've preached them, I don't want to preach any more just sermons, I don't want to hear any more! I don't want any more alliterations, any more point this, that and the other - I don't want them if that's all they are, I don't want them! I want to hear from God! Where can we go to hear from God? Where can we go to be fed in our spirits with the manna that comes down from heaven? It's still coming down - but there is a famine in the land, a famine of the word of God - not the Bible, but the spoken communication from the Divine heart.

Let's move on to the secret weapon - all-prayer. Verse 18, look at it and we will close things up as quickly as possible: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints'. Now I'll just give a casual dealing with each of these aspects of all-prayer. Well, any warfare will have, intrinsic and vital to it, communications with H.Q. It's necessary to be in touch with headquarters where the direction of operations is derived. Prayer is a two-way communication. It doesn't seem that way at times, and some of us have this idea of prayer being a running monologue. You maybe get down on your knees, or whatever you do, blah, blah, blah, and you go down the list, and you go through your routine - you mightn't have a written liturgy, but you have your own, and you just go through it. You maybe look at the clock, and it's like holding your breath underwater - you've done 30 seconds, and you go down again for another 30 seconds. Let's be honest: it can be a real wrestling match.

Often it's this idea of monologue to God, but prayer is not a monologue - it isn't even dialogue, it's not even speech all the time. It's meditation, it can be waiting, it can be silence, it can be listening, it can be singing and praising, just waiting on God, just soaking in His presence, appreciating Him, praying Scripture, meditating on Scripture - it's not all about speaking. It is relational, but in respect to the battle it is a vital weapon against the enemy. Derek Prince in his very helpful book, 'The Prayer Warrior', says: 'Prayer is the intercontinental ballistic missile. It reaches across oceans and continents, striking the forces of Satan wherever they are at work. You can even reach out against Satan's headquarters in the heavenlies' - a powerful weapon, prayer. I'm not sure we use it that much as a weapon. We pray for our own needs, maybe we pray corporately in a gathering like this for the needs of our brothers and sisters, but how do we use prayer in the battle against the forces of darkness? Are we really engaged in that at any level? Against those strongholds that have our land and have our families? Do we war? We are told that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, not fleshly, but they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, and every imagination that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. We've got mighty weapons to use to effect change in our communities and among our loved ones!

This weapon of all-prayer is multifaceted, if you look at it. First of all we read of constant prayer, praying always - that's prayer as a way of life. I mean there is nobody walks around talking to God all the time, nobody - no matter whether they say they do, they don't do that. You couldn't operate as a human being, God didn't create you

to do that. God created you with a spirit, like an antenna, to be in communication with God. You see, prayer, in this sense, is an attitude of open fellowship with God, whereby you know that you are right with Him, and you can give up little arrow prayers as we often do - but it's a continual communion with God, and that is very possible. I like to call it practising the presence of God, which is very real. You see, the devil wants to disturb that general disposition and attitude of prayerfulness. He wants to turn us to worry, to fear, to fretting and anxiety. He wants to change focus on to something that is of the world, the flesh, or the evil one - but we can be constantly in the Throne Room. We can be constantly engaged with our Heavenly Father via our hearts.

Then we read here: 'Praying always with all prayer' - what that means is all sorts of prayer. You know that there is not just one type of prayer, there are all sorts of times that we can pray. The psalmists said: 'Morning, evening and noon I will cry aloud', in another place he said 'Seven times a day I will cry to You'. Some traditions in the past have kept what is called the offices of prayer: morning, and afternoon, and evening, and then a night compline - and it's a good discipline, as long as it doesn't become a religious form alone. It's good to pepper your day, punctuate your day - I mean, that's what you do with food, isn't it? You don't have a big Ulster Fry in the morning - it might get you past lunch, but it will not do for an evening meal and supper, you'll need a little bit more later on. How often we do that with God - even if we do have a great quiet time, and maybe we go over ten minutes, we try and live the rest of the day on it. Why not pepper your day with ten minutes, ten minute sessions throughout the day?

All types of prayer, at all times, in all sorts of ways - there is a varied prayer. Prayer is just a general word, an approach to God - but there is praise, there is thanksgiving: 'Enter His gifts with thanksgiving, His courts with praise' - there is an approach to God. We don't want to be legalistic about it, but praise and thanksgiving bring us into the presence of God. That's why singing is not just a program filler, it's meant to actually help us enter God's presence. Praise, thanksgiving, waiting, intercession, praying on behalf of others, standing between, listening, Scripture praying, singing - and then here in verse 18 it mentions 'supplication', which is specific requests. You know, if you want specific answers, you need to ask specifically.

D.L. Moody, the great evangelist, was convening a meeting on one occasion at one of his campaigns, and he invited some visiting minister to open in prayer. He got up and he started going on and on, droning, and round the world for a shortcut - and D.L. Moody pulled his coattails, and he said: 'Call Him 'Father', and ask Him for something!'. That's it: call Him 'Father', and ask Him for something. We do need to reverence Him, and praise Him, and worship Him, and thank Him - enter like that - but I don't know that there are any prayers, or certainly not many, in the Bible that don't ask for something. Supplicate.

Thirdly: 'in the Spirit' - that's prayer animated by the Holy Spirit. You say: 'Well, is that not obvious?'. Well, it's not really, because - and again this is something that is not easily seen, it's a spiritual thing - but you can be praying soulish prayers. Soulish prayers, what's that? Well, the soul is made up of what? The mind, the emotion, and the will - and you could be praying a prayer from the intellect. You're talking to God all about the Bible, or all about what God - you know how folk tell God what He used to do, and tell the Lord what's in the book of Genesis, because He might have forgotten -

do you know what I'm talking about? It's intellectual, it's the mind, and sometimes it's telling everybody what I know. Now, that might be subconscious. There can be emotional prayers, that can be a prayer that is coming out of some hurt that you have - maybe you've got something against somebody, and you're actually in your prayers trying to get a dig. That wouldn't happen, sure it wouldn't? I've probably done that, and I'm tempted to do it at times - but it's wrong. It's soulish praying. Or there is a wilful praying, where I'm trying to exert my will, I'm trying to influence a meeting or influence other people through what I'm saying. All of these are horizontal praying, they're not to God at all - and yet they are prayers that can be answered, I think anyway, but not by the Living God of heaven. If they are ungodly and carnal, they are things that the enemy can see as a right to go in and cause havoc - but a spiritual prayer is a prayer where you, in your spirit, are just communicating to God, and you're not really caring who is around you, or what verbiage that you're using, or whether you're using the right phraseology or the wrong phraseology.

Be very careful - I'm not saying that you can't, especially as leaders, help people and instruct them in how to pray - but when I think of some of the things that were said to me as a wee fella, by older men who were meant to be wise and mature - honestly, if I had taken them to heart! Some wanted me to pray like Shakespeare, other people want to bind you - don't get too excited! It's got to be between you and God, and make sure that we're not praying soulish prayers.

Then the fourth thing is watching - now that doesn't mean keep your eyes open, although it's advisable certainly when you're driving. But even when you're ministering to people sometimes, I mean I heard of somebody who was praying for somebody for an issue that they had, and they were praying and really feeling that they were getting through to God - and they opened their eyes and they were gone! So it's advisable to keep your eyes open sometimes, and when you're doing spiritual battle with the enemy it's important to see how God is coming on people, and how they are reacting to what God is doing - but it really means: be alert, be spiritually alert, be sober! Be tuned in to what's going on, a watchful disposition, watching that the enemy doesn't get an advantage over you. Those who come and correct people, and help those who have fallen down, we are exhorted to take a lesson yourself, lest you fall in the same manner! Be watchful!

Then fifthly: all perseverance - a persistent determination. Now there's not a lot of this around in life, and I'm not certainly claiming to have a whole heap of it either. We have a really lethargic generation, and the older generation were made of sterner stuff, there is no doubt about it. They had more perseverance in them in many respects, but we have lost this in the area of prayer - where we press through. You know that parable of the importunate widow, and the judge gave up because he was sick listening to her. You know the friend who kept knocking the friend up in the middle of the night to get some bread, and he kept hammering and hammering and hammering, and he came to give him because he had aroused him. Isaiah says: 'Give Him no rest, give God no rest!'. Jesus said: 'If you ask, and you seek, and you knock, you'll find!'. We need persistence and perseverance.

Then sixthly and finally: 'For all the saints' - there has to be a unifying objective. I mean, let's be honest: analyse your prayer life if it is existent, let's be truthful. There's not a lot of Christians praying, most pastors - surveys have been done - are only praying a maximum of about 7 or 10 minutes in a day, and that's being generous at

times. Let's be honest: out of your prayer time, what is expended on yourself? Again, it's not wrong to ask for things, but is there an imbalance? Even in the prayers of a fellowship, what is expended on the parochial nature of the activity that's going on? Whereas the word of God is exhorting us to pray for all the saints, and that means them all, the whole lot over the whole world. We need to have a kingdom vision, a kingdom vision: in our battle, in our warfare, and in our praying.

Well, that's it. The armour of God - have you got it on? I need to finish, but if you look at each piece of armour, do you know what you will find? Each piece is really something to do with Jesus, it's something to do with Jesus, a picture of Christ. He is the truth, the belt; He is our righteousness, the breastplate; He is our peace, isn't that right? The feet, the shoes. Our faith is made possible, well, it's the faith of Christ, Galatians 2:20 says He is our deliverance, He is our hope, the helmet - this hope purifies us, even as He is pure. He is the Word, the Living Word of God. Do you know what we are meant to do? This is what Romans 13:12-14 says: 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts'.

To put on the armour is really to put on Christ.

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