The Spiritual War : The Principalities and Powers

The rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places and our defence and attack in the spiritual war

"The fall of man has created a perpetual crisis. It will last until sin has been put down and Christ reigns over a redeemed and restored world. Until that time the earth remains a disaster area and its inhabitants live in a state of extraordinary emergency." A. W. Tozer in **Born after Midnight**

So all of life is lived out in a spiritual combat zone.

Some introductory remarks:

1. God is depicted in the Bible as a God at war

Wait a minute! Isn't this too primitive a concept – likening God to Mars, the Roman god of war? Yet God has declared war on sin and the devil (2 Cor. 10:34) and so should we.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ …."

With the Holy Spirit, we have the wisdom and power to attack the fortresses of Satan in the hearts of men. **But** the battle must be waged on a spiritual level. There is a thrilling picture of the Lord Jesus in Rev. 19:11 ***"Then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. The One sitting on it is called Faithful and True and in righteousness He judges and <u>makes war</u>."***

In the Old Testament God revealed Himself to His people as a God of War. (Ex. 14:14-15:3) The only way to turn a nation of slaves into a disciplined nation of conquering fighters was for them to **see** God as a God of War. [Compare Ex. 13:17 with Ex. 17:8-16]

2. A New Testament picture of the believer's life as soldiering

The Apostle Paul saw himself as a soldier because he saw that God was at war. (2 Tim. 2:1-4 and 4:7) Our ability to be strong in the Lord comes from God alone. It doesn't come from ourselves or our knowledge as well-taught believers. We need to be strong because we are being hurled into battle against a mighty, tireless and implacable foe.

3. The reality of the battle: the cosmic warfare worldview of the Bible

There are some alternative views as to how an Almighty God, who always does what is right and good, allows so much evil to happen on this earth. This is a huge subject! How can we give a Biblically-based rational argument for the problem of pain?

The cosmic warfare worldview is the perspective on reality that centres on the conviction that good and evil, fortunate and unfortunate aspects of life are largely to be interpreted as a result of good and evil; friendly or hostile – spirits warring against each other and against us. This is not to deny that evil is also
a reality of the human heart and of human society for Biblical authors consistently demonstrate a passionate concern to confront evil in all the individual and societal forms it takes.

But I think the Biblical authors understood **all** evil in the context of a spiritual war. So for us to wage war against things like injustice, oppression, greed and apathy towards the needy, is to participate in the cosmic war that has long since engulfed the earth. I am not a cultural anthropologist, but as far as I'm aware, **all cultures** have a clear awareness that something has gone wrong with the world and the world is at war! In our secular, westernised culture we tend to dismiss all this as mythology coming from ignorant and primitive superstition.

The Biblical worldview has at its core the premise that there is only One Eternal God whose character is perfect and who is the Omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of **all** that is. But there are other

intermediary spiritual/cosmic beings that the Bible calls "gods", "angels", "demons" and "principalities and powers". The whole of creation is caught up in the crossfire of an age-old cosmic battle between good and evil. Against this backdrop of a warfare worldview, the purpose and unity of the ministry of the Lord Jesus becomes fully intelligible. The truth is that hostile, evil, cosmic forces that seek to destroy God's wonderful plan for the cosmos have seized God's good creation. God wages war against these forces and through the person of the Lord Jesus has secured the overthrow of this evil cosmic army. The church has been called to be the decisive means by which this final overthrow is to be carried out.

I think this worldview gives us a much better understanding of the problem of evil. The assumption is that God created both angelic beings and human beings with the ability to make independent choices. So Divine goodness does not completely control all events in the world. God works **with** the angels and believers and battles against other created beings. While none of these beings can ever match God's power, each has some degree of genuine influence within the cosmos. This implies that evil is to be expected and that evil serves no higher purpose.

It is a metaphysical question as to why God would create a world in which cosmic war **could** break out. Without doubt we will find out one day when we see the Lord Jesus. But in the meantime, the warfare worldview gives us a spiritual opponent to overcome. I believe we need less theologising about evil and more waging war against it. The New Testament is inclined to attribute pain and suffering to the evil purposes of Satan and demons. It appears to expect evil and urges us to fight against it. So the problem of evil in the New Testament is **not** a problem to understand intellectually. It is a problem to **overcome**. This is the great emphasis of the New Testament.

"Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world." (1 Jn. 5:4)

There are seven promises to the overcomers in the seven churches in Revelation.
[Rev. 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21]

"And they <u>have</u> overcome him (Satan) ***by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives to the death."*** (Rev. 12:11)

"They (the cosmic forces of evil) ***will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings."*** (Rev. 17:14)

"He who overcomes will inherit all things and I will be his God and he will be My son." (Rev. 21:7)

Revelation is a battle manual! It stirs us to wake up and put our armour on for, ***"There is a war in heaven*** (the cosmos)." (Rev. 12:7)

4. The winner of the war – the Lord Jesus

"I have said these things to you that in Me you may have <u>peace</u>. In the world you will have tribulation (war?) ***but take heart, I have overcome the world."*** (Jn. 16:33) [Cheer up!]

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." (Heb. 10:23) [Hold fast]

"Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever' " (Rev. 11:5) [Get ready]

Read Psalms 96, 97, 98 and 19 and worship Him for His victory now.

Knowing and understanding our enemy

- **Who is <u>not</u> our enemy?**
  - **Not yourself** … that would be suicide! Remember Saul died on his own sword after a life of hurting himself.
  - **Not your fellow believers** … that would be murder!

"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." (1 Jn. 3:15-16) – i.e. anything less than love for the brethren is unjustifiable homicide.

- **Not any human being** … ***"We wrestle not against flesh and blood …."*** (Eph. 6:12)

Satan may use people to persecute us, lie to us, cheat us, hurt us or even kill us. Our enemy remains hidden but moves people like pawns on a chessboard. People are involved. We feel the pain they inflict. We hear the evil things they say. We see the evil that people do, but **they are not the enemy**. We must love **all** people. We are fighting in a far greater arena than the one we can see.

Remember our enemy is not man's philosophical ideas or political forces. It is not an intellectual battle or a political battle. It is not a battle against hedonism or materialism. No! It is a battle against the "powers" that are behind and controlling these spheres.

➢ **Our enemy**

- **The world** – the enemy outside (1 Jn. 2:15-17) (visible things drawing you away from God)
- **The flesh** – the enemy inside (Gal. 5:24)
- **Demonic forces** – the enemy on the outside trying to get in and control us

Know your enemy, but don't get obsessed by him.

Satan delights in being the centre of attention – being talked about. It is true that he can't be dismissed or ignored as non-existent, but the focus of a believer must always be on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember:

- **The Lord Jesus <u>created</u> the principalities and powers**. (Col. 1:15-17)

This means that the Lord Jesus is greater than they are. They continue to exist by His will. There is no dualism in the created universe – physical or spiritual.

How and why did they fall? For the most part the Bible gives no direct answer. It assumes that all angelic beings had 'free wills'. Jude 6 refers to, ***"Some angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling"***. So some angels rebelled against God and are morally responsible for their evil decision – see 2 Peter 2:4-9. In their rebellion they were not carrying out some pre-ordained plan of God. They were rebelling against God's plan. We are given hints as to the cause of their rebellion:

- ✓ Conceit (1 Tim. 3:6)
- ✓ Pride (like Satan – Is. 14:13-14)

God made them. They had a place around God's throne and sang His praise. Possibly one of the greatest of them all was Lucifer, Son of the Morning. But he rebelled and perhaps one third of the angels joined him.

- **The Lord Jesus has conquered the principalities and powers** (Col. 2:15)

"***Having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the Cross".***

Satan and the fallen angels are at enmity with God. But the Lord Jesus, in His death on the Cross, atoned for all our sin and so robbed Satan of any claims over us. In His ascension the Lord Jesus was exalted over all principalities and powers. (Eph. 1:20-22) In Christ we share this exalted position with Him. (Eph. 2:5-6)

- **Believers are still in conflict with the principalities and powers** (Eph. 6:12)

Satan and his hosts are defeated in principle, but in practice until the Lord Jesus returns again they do oppose with malicious intensity the believer and his purpose to extend the Kingdom of God.

Learn to recognise our enemy and the sort of activities that characterise him.

- **The character and characteristic activities of Satan**

  These are illustrated by the titles given to him in the Bible:

  - ✓ **Satan** = **adversary**. He does all he can to incite rebellion against God. He is the source of questions – Why? Why? Why does God allow this? Why shouldn't I do this? (See Job 1:7-2:7 and 1 Chron. 21:1)
  - ✓ **The Devil** = the **accuser**, the **malignant slanderer**. He is out to destroy men and the church before God (cf. Job). He also attempts to destroy all people by encouraging them to destroy each other (Jn. 8:44) because we are made in the image of God. (See Zech. 3:1)
  - ✓ In Revelation Satan is named ***"Abaddon and Apollyon"*** (Rev. 9:11) – both meaning **destroyer**.
  - ✓ **Satan is <u>not</u> omnipresent.** This is a unique characteristic of God alone.
  - ✓ **He is <u>not</u> omniscient.** He may be diabolically clever, but he makes mistakes. His biggest mistake
    was to organise and motivate the Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.
  - ✓ **He is <u>not</u> omnipotent.** He is powerful, but he cannot thwart God's purposes.
  - ✓ **He is a spirit and he controls the kingdom of darkness** through a hierarchy of evil spirits. At all times all evil angels are under restraint until the final judgement. (2 Pet. 2:4,9)
  - ✓ **He is also given other names**:

    * **The serpent** (Gen. 3:1,14; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9, 20:2)
    * **Be-elzebul** (the lord of flies) (Mt. 10:25; 12:24,27; Lk. 11:15)
    * **"The ruler of this world"** – referring to the present evil world system in opposition to God (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 and 1 Jn. 5:19)
    * **The prince of the power of the air** (Eph. 2:2)
    * **The Evil One** (Mt. 13:19; 1 Jn. 2:13)

- **The activity of Satan and demons**

  - ✓ **Satan was the originator of sin.**
    Satan sinned before any human being did so. (2 Cor. 11:3) He was a ***"Murderer from the beginning"*** and ***"a liar and the father of lies"***. (Jn. 8:44) 1 Jn. 3:8 says, ***"The Devil has been sinning from the beginning."***
  - ✓ **Satan is viewed as *"the god of this world"*** (2 Cor. 4:4), as ***"the ruler of the power of the air"*** (Eph. 2:2) and as still controlling ***"the whole world"***. (1 Jn. 5:19) The world is still fundamentally evil (Gal. 1:14; Eph. 5:16) and he is the primary influence behind all sin. In Paul's view, the Devil and "the powers" are as pervasive in this world as the air we breathe. The atmosphere of the world is spiritually diabolical!
  - ✓ **Demons oppose and try to destroy every work of God**
    * The temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1-6)
    * The temptation of the Lord Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11)

    They use lies (Jn. 8:44), deception (Rev. 12:9) and murder (Ps. 106:37; Jn. 8:44). They try and blind people to the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:4) and seek to keep them in bondage to things that hinder them from coming to God (Gal. 4:8). They use temptation, doubt, fear, guilt, shame, confusion, sickness, envy, pride, slander and any other means to hinder a believer's witness and usefulness.

In Rom. 8:34-39 Paul implies that these demonic powers can bring about, ***"hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*** (death)". But he insists that none of these things – i.e. no demonic power, ***"will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

- ✓ **Demons are limited by God's control and have limited power.**

  The story of Job shows they could only do what God gave them permission to do. (Job 1:12; 2:6) The demons are kept ***"in eternal chains"*** (Jude 6) and we can successfully resist their influence
  by using the authority that the Lord Jesus has given us. (James 4:7) Sin is a weakening and destructive force. Demons have power that is limited although it is significant – probably less than the great angels. Demons don't know the future. They can't read our minds or our thoughts. Only God knows the future. (Is. 46:9-10) Even the angels don't know the time of the Lord's return. (Mk. 13:32)

  The Lord Jesus knows our thoughts. (Mt. 9:4; 12:25; Mk. 2:8; Lk. 6:18; 11:17) Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar that only God knows our thoughts. (Dan. 2:27-28) The Lord Jesus explained that His power over demons is a distinguishing mark of His inauguration of the reign of God on the earth. (Mt. 12:28-29) Authority over the powers of evil has been extended to us. (1 Jn. 3:8 – see also Acts 8:7; 16:18; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9) The end of demonic power is given in Rev. 20:10.

The Rulers, the Powers and the Spiritual Forces of Wickedness

See references to these superhuman beings in Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10,15.

There appears to be a hierarchy of other high-level beings called ***"powers"*** or ***"authorities"*** (see Rom. 8:38; 13:1; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10,15)

There are other classes of fallen angelic beings named in Greek:

* *'kyriotetos'* - dominion (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16)
* *'kosmokratores'* - cosmic powers (Eph. 6:12)
* *'thronoi'* - thrones (Col. 1:16)
* *'pneumatiku'* - spiritual forces (Eph. 6:12)

There is nothing in Scripture that clearly shows how the hierarchy is structured – i.e. no details of the ranks and functions of the various levels of demonic beings. But Daniel 10 implies that some demonic "power" controls areas that coincide with human control – "The Prince of Greece" and "The Prince of Persia".

Several general ideas are given about the ***"principalities and powers"*** (*'archai' 'archontes'*).

- **The Jews understood that "the powers" are personal, high-level spiritual beings of angelic origin.** The New Testament doesn't emphasise the personal spiritual nature of "the powers" - i.e. who they are. It rather emphasises the fact that they have a role in **conditioning life on earth**. The emphasis is on what they **do** rather than who they **are**. They form the skeleton of ***"the present evil age"***. (Gal. 1:4) They are the "structures of evil".

A major view held by many is that just as human beings were to give **order** to animals, vegetation and minerals (the physical world), so "the powers" were originally to give **order and structure** to human life. So "the powers" influence: human traditions, cultures, philosophy, accepted morality, music, public opinion, media, education, the state (government), society and how it functions, law, justice issues and politics. Cultures, nations, government, law etc. are not just human inventions. They are

divinely mandated structures (with oversight by spiritual beings) with the purpose of preserving human life to help all human beings reach their full potential.

The implication in Scripture is that they were all created angelic spirits, but they had different roles, levels and responsibilities.

- **"The powers" are not conceived as originally evil in themselves.** But many of them joined in the rebellion of Satan prior to the creation of man. [Perhaps 1/3 of "the powers" fell - Rev. 12:4] Since the Fall our sin and rebellion has placed us (as human beings) and **some** of "the powers" in opposition to God. It is possible that **some** powers never fell or rebelled. So Eph. 6:12 is speaking about ***"the rulers"***, ***"the authorities"***, ***"the cosmic powers of this present darkness"*** and ***"spiritual forces of evil in the spiritual realms"***. Clearly these are all fallen/rebellious spiritual beings.

- **The principal strategy of the powers of evil is to separate us from the love of God.** (Rom. 8:38-39) "The powers" seek to usurp God's authority and His position. They want to become 'gods' themselves demanding our allegiance and ultimately our worship. Gal. 4:3 says we were once slaves to these "powers". They strongly resent any challenge to their terrible hold on the kingdoms of men.

Human beings don't exhibit their rebellion against God at all times and in all circumstances. So it seems that "the powers" still perform part of their divinely appointed functions. Perhaps the angelic beings loyal to God restrain them, for usually these angelic beings still hold human life together and prevent total social chaos. But the Evil Powers act in such a way that they hold human society **away** from God.

They usually operate on a "divide and rule" basis. We observe divisions between people: between families, people groups, countries and cultures. We observe division in the church and between churches. We long for unity. We long for a working together. We see the power of synergy. We know that in unity, ***"The Lord commands a blessing"***. (Ps. 133:1,3) Why do we so often fail? The answer is that it is a demonic strategy that divides us.

Here are a few examples:

- **Economically:** "the powers" bring division between rich and poor. In so doing, they dominate the rich and control them through pride and arrogance, a love of self-centred hedonism and a passion to control others – especially the poor. The poor are angry, envious, wretched, sick and with high rates of mortality. Western greed and materialism is due to the influence of "the powers". History is full of cruel owners and poor slaves. Sadly, there are still millions of slaves in the world today.

- **Academically:** children with a high IQ and high scholastic achievements are honoured and encouraged to the point that they think they are the best – the elite, better than anyone else. But that pride brings them under the control of "the powers". Those with lower IQs are often neglected, despised and suffer from low self-esteem. Controlled by "the powers", they often suffer from physical and psychological abuse.

- **In sports or in fashion:** the same division occurs. Those who are good at sports are honoured and praised. Those who are not so good are often friendless and have a low self-image. "The powers" control both sides. It is the same in fashion. I read somewhere that 90% of women 18-24 years old thought they were ugly. Again this is a product of a "divide and rule" policy. People are being controlled and manipulated by "the powers".

- **The gender issue:** in the Middle East, legally a woman is only worth half a man, but it is often less! Women are devalued. Men are over-valued.

- **Racial tensions and a nationalistic spirit:** this is the source of a great deal of trouble. Think of the Rwandan Genocide or the inter-tribal fighting in Kenya. War and victimisation are due to idolatrous nationalism.

- **The legal systems:** in Muslim countries there is one law for Muslims and another for those of 'dhimmi' status. There is no equality under the law. Systemic political corruption and societal racism are both the result of the influence of "the powers".

I hope you are beginning to see how "the principalities and powers" operate by bringing division between people and in this way controlling and manipulating people and their behaviour and bringing them into bondage. But the Lord Jesus has set us free from all this!

"For all of you who are baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:27-28)

So the principal fact is the Fall (!) –the Fall of the angels and the Fall of human beings in the Garden. Because of this failure these evil powers are controlling and manipulating about 8 million of us. They are doing all in their power to keep us away from God. But at the same time, they hold the 'English way of life' together in a somewhat shambolic manner, but preserving us from total chaos.

These high-level "powers" seem not to hassle **individuals** (as was true of low-level demons in the ministry of the Lord Jesus while He was on earth), but rather concentrate on the foundational structures of perhaps the whole cosmos and society. There is something more powerful, more sinister and perhaps less obvious about the operation of "the powers" than there is about the work of particular demons.

The means used by the powers to manipulate us [***"The wiles of the devil"***]

There are many, many "wiles". We don't know them all, but God does! We can't guard against them all, but God can help us to do so.

- **Deception:** they blind man's mind to the truth, sowing seeds of distortion/unbelief. (2 Cor. 4:4)
  - ✓ Re: **truth in general**, but more particularly Biblical truth (2 Cor. 11:13-15) leading to a false view of God, unbelief about His goodness, love and justice, leading to a false view of God's Word. Remember Eve was deceived.
  - ✓ Re: **the truth about themselves** and their influence. They attempt to lead us into the extreme polar opposites – disbelief in their insistence at one end and at the other end seeing their activity in every incident generating fear that leads to paralysis.
  - ✓ Re: **our position "in Christ"** that enables us to be triumphant over all ***"the wiles of the devil"***. If we are deceived or 'forget', we rapidly get a false view of our circumstances and this leads to discontent, grumbling, slander, gossip and false accusations.

Satan and the powers are ultimately behind all false teaching (1 Jn. 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 7) enslaving people in legalism, in false doctrines and in false philosophies. (Gal. 4:8-10; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 4:1-5) Sacrifices offered to idols are really offered to demons. (1 Cor. 10:20)

Here are some of Satan's most believable lies

[They need more unpacking than we have time or space for here.]

Satan tries to divert us from:

1. **Believing** in the goodness of God's will = unbelief
2. **Obeying** God's will = disobedience
3. **Walking** God's way = backsliding

[Note: Biblical teaching focuses on balance. The choice is not hedonism **or** asceticism.]

Most believable lies:

- God is a cosmic sadist.
- God is a liar.
- There is no destiny.
- God is not worthy.

- Adversity must produce apostasy.
- This life is everything.
- God should work miracles on demand.
- We can exploit the promises of God out of context.
- Don't go the way of the Cross.
- Satan's way is the only way to 'success' (power, money and pleasure in this life).

Remember:

"For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to obey Christ." (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

And again, ***"Do not be conformed to this world,*** (a world governed and controlled by the powers) ***but be transformed by the renewal of your minds."*** (Rom. 12:2) Our minds are a battlefield between the Evil One who blinds and the Saviour who brings light. (2 Cor. 4:4-6)

Slander leading to schism

Satan and "the powers" lead a perpetual smear campaign against God and believers. He is particularly trying to destroy the glory of the Lord Jesus. One of his most successful strategies is to use believers to slander each other! This causes splits, a 'party spirit', opposing camps and schisms over all sorts of non-essentials. This is the 'divide and rule' strategy - division by sex, age, race, intelligence, beauty, wealth etc. We are too easily manipulated.

Depression

The "powers" seek to attack us mentally – especially trying to depress us in different ways:

- Causing us to rely on our feelings rather than facts in matters of forgiveness, acceptance by the Father, spiritual growth and spiritual/moral strength
- By direct attacks on our minds and/or bodies

Demonic activity and the occult

The occult is used to bring people into bondage and hold them there.
[This includes "Folk Religion".]

There are three forms of attack. We are tempted by:

- **A wish for a knowledge of the future**
  The basis for this is a rising tide of insecurity. Read Is. 47:12-15 – a devastating attack on astrology.
- **The offer of magical powers** (so much loved in children's cartoons!)
  Note: the teaching of the Bible on ***"lying wonders"*** (2 Thess. 2:9)
- **A desire to be 'God-like'** – controlling and manipulating people

There are over 50 references to the occult in the Old and New Testaments. Every reference clearly shows that the occult is deeply offensive to God and should have absolutely no influence in the believer's life. [See Lev. 19:26,31; 20:6,7 and Acts 13:6-12; 19:8-20]

So Satan is a deceiver (Rev. 12:9) but can appear to us as an ***"angel of light"***. (2 Cor. 11:14)

Note: ***"the principalities and powers"*** most often operate **through** human beings. So we men and women – wittingly or unwittingly – do their will and their work. We can call these human beings 'linkages' – connecting these demonic forces with direct human activity.

Two marks of a "link":

1. They tend to always talk about themselves. They are very self-centred – self-focussed.
2. They seek to draw you away – gradually or directly – from acting on the teaching of the New Testament.

As a roaring lion! (1 Peter 5:8)

Why do lions roar? Apparently their eyes are not too good and their favourite food is often subtly camouflaged. Lions roar to panic the animal into breaking out of its camouflage and running. It can then be chased and caught.

Satan and "the powers" constantly and persistently attack us. They roar! – i.e. they are aggressive, tempting us to panic. Fear causes us to run. Fear is a very great enemy. How do we defend ourselves against this? **Stand still!** (Ps. 46:10)

By surprise ambush – the fiery darts/arrows

These arrows come flying out in the night. Typical arrows are: unbelief, materialism, legalism, judgmentalism, 'scrougism', bitterness, impurity, extremism, ego trips, perfectionist attitudes, ignorance, disunity, false priorities (doing good but not doing the best) etc. The list is long! There are attacks on our health, attempts to hinder the work, strange dark experiences of a desert in our souls so we think we are going mad!

But note: (very important!) the Lord Jesus says, ***"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it"***.

"Hell" here is *'hades'* in Greek. This is clearly a metaphorical reference to the fortified walls of the satanic fortress. The gates are closed to keep the attacking army out. Remember "the gates of the city" were where the officials sat and where important military decisions were made. So these "gates" will not be able to "prevail" against the church.

The Lord Jesus portrays the church as being on the offensive and Satan's kingdom as on the defensive. The Lord Jesus is the Aggressor! He will triumph! For He came to:

- ***"destroy the works of the Devil"*** (1 Jn. 3:8)
- ***"disarm the rulers and authorities"*** (Col. 2:5)
- ***"destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the Devil"*** (Heb. 2:14)

Humanity and the cosmos are liberated ***"from the power of darkness and transferred … into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son"***. (Col. 1:13)

As God's people, we are 'fighting' in the interval between 'victory achieved' (on the Cross) and 'victory seen' (when the Lord Jesus returns again).

The Christian life as warfare

To follow the Lord Jesus is to do battle with the Prince of Darkness. Notice that Paul doesn't tell us to 'be strong', but to, ***"be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might"***. We don't fight alone. We don't **hope** for victory. Victory has already been won. It is very important we believe that we can be strong. God can make us so!

Secondly, notice that winning doesn't come automatically. It is a fight! It can be very bitter! The greater part of a believer's life is a battle! We are called to battle and to conflict. We must be strong and able to stand our ground when things are at their worst.

Frank Houghton of the CIM wrote:

"It is our secret joy to find
The task assigned beyond our powers.
For thus if ought of good be wrought
Clearly the praise is His not ours."

In the New Testament there appear to be three major ways to do this:

1. Putting on our spiritual armour
2. Spreading the influence of the Kingdom
3. Exorcisms of people "tormented by unclean spirits"

I will look briefly at the last of these first and then concentrate on the first.

The Bible mentions several "weapons of our warfare":

- **Worship and thanksgiving:** look up the story of Jehoshaphat sending out the singers to worship and praise the Lord in front of the army. (2 Chron. 20:1-20)
- **The 'body life' of the church:** relationships of love, submission and unity are all a powerful defence against the attacks of the enemy.
- **God's provision of the armour of light** against all attacks of the enemy and against the breakdown of our faith. We will look at this in some detail.
- **The filling of the Holy Spirit** will give us a 'fighting spirit' against all the enemies of God in the spiritual realm.

Don't think spiritual warfare only affects failing Christians. Usually it is the opposite! "He who stands near the General is sure to be shot at"!

Exorcisms in Acts

There are four references to exorcisms in Acts and it appears that exorcism was a standard part of early Christian ministry.

Acts 5: 12, 16: People were freed from evil spirits.

Acts 8:7: Philip exorcised shrieking evil spirits out of people while evangelising Samaria.

Acts 16:16-18: Paul exorcised a spirit of divination out of a slave girl who was apparently hindering his ministry by undermining his credibility.

Acts 19:13-16: The regularity of exorcisms in the early church is revealed in the story of the seven sons of Sceva. These Jewish exorcists were unsuccessfully trying to exorcise demons, ***"by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims"***.

This confirms that exorcism was fairly common in the ministry of the church in the First Century AD. It is interesting that the demons seemed to know their real opponents and to fear them. This is a huge subject!

Modern exorcists can sometimes physically and mentally abuse the people 'possessed' and at times intimidate them. This is ungodly!

Putting on our spiritual armour (The emphasis of Ephesians chapter 6)

To be, ***"Strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power"*** means you have to put on, ***"the whole armour of God"***. With this armour on, the believer is to ***"stand firm"*** and ***"keep alert"***. We are to hold our ground against all attacks and we are to be ever watchful of an ever-present enemy.

'Be strong/stand' implies that we might get knocked off our feet and trampled down in this battle against these dark powers. But we are called to be strong, to endure, to persevere and to overcome. Our Saviour calls us to conquest and a crown as well as to battle and conflict against the powers of darkness.

The Roman army was a very formidable fighting force. For nearly 1600 years (until the capture of Constantinople in 1453 AD) they battled in Europe and round the Mediterranean. Why were they so successful? The basic reason was because they fought in highly organised units of cohorts and legions. A legion was about 5000-6000 soldiers and it was this tactical strength that helped them win so many battles.

Paul is probably not thinking of just **one** soldier on a battlefield, but of an army of soldiers fighting **together** – fully trained and equipped. What a picture of a united, disciplined church!

Paul uses similar terminology in 1 Thess. 5:8, ***"Put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation"***.

Paul tells the Romans (13:12) To,***"Lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light"***.

Paul tells Timothy to, ***"Share in suffering like a good soldier of Jesus Christ"***. He reminds him that, ***"No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs. The soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer"***. (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

How are we to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might? The first step is to admit that we are inherently weak – it is a recognised, accepted weakness! There is a paradox: Paul found that our human weakness is the crucible in which divine power is perfected!

So the first step is to accept your weakness before the Lord Jesus. He will then exert His great power (the power of Eph. 1:19) into your weakness – His strength for your weakness. We suffer the weakness as He exerts His power! It is nothing to do with how I **feel**. See Col. 1:11, ***"May you be strengthened with <u>all power</u>, according to His glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy …."***

Divine strength only operates when we accept our weakness of body and mind. Accept your weakness and accept that His great power will operate in and through you to enable you to fulfil all God's purposes for you. So accept the weakness of your body, the pressure on your spirit and the limitations of your circumstances. Paul knew extremely difficult circumstances (2 Cor. 11:23-28), yet he never lost heart.
We don't lose heart when we live in the Spirit and not in the flesh; when we look not at things seen, but at the unseen; when we don't crumble under tangible pressure, but live in the heavenlies with the Lord Jesus. These "wiles" of the devil highlight the attitude we need to maintain in the battle – the bent of our minds – the direction of our spirit's gaze.

We will need courage! Remember the word God spoke to Joshua, ***"Only be strong and very ourageous"***. (Joshua 1:7) He needed to be strong and resolute.

Paul says we are to be, ***"Strong <u>in the Lord</u>"***. Our strength lies not in our self-will, but in the Lord. We need to be firm in our faith in an Almighty God who will support us in every trial. **Then** we can overcome temptation victoriously. Then we will be adequate for every situation.

"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is <u>from God</u>." (2 Cor. 3:5)

"I can do all things <u>through Him who strengthens me</u>." (Phil. 4:13)

"Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord God is everlasting strength." (Is. 26:4)

" … For He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'. So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper. I will not fear.' " (Heb. 13:5-6)

So our ability to stand is not related to **our** feelings or **our** abilities. We may often feel totally inadequate before confronting a situation. Yet in turning our eyes on the Lord, there is unspeakable peace. There is a quiet joy of assurance that with the Holy Spirit's indwelling power we can meet the day's demands and all its emergent needs. It is never a question of being qualified in ourselves. So be strong **in the Lord**. All else is false security. All other strength or competence will fail. We can add nothing to the power and ability of the Lord Jesus!

Armour for our protection in battle

"Put on the whole armour of God." As Paul wrote he was probably chained to a Roman soldier. He had been in the company of soldiers for many years and he knew about their armour. God's armour is designed to protect us (body, mind and spirit) from the weapons of the enemy. We aren't sent into this battle against satanic forces with inadequate protection.

Paul doesn't say, 'Be strong'. We can't fight in our own strength. We never fight alone. We don't **hope** for victory because the victory **has been won**! But winning doesn't come automatically.

It is God's armour. In Isaiah we see depicted a time of great difficulty for the people of God and the promise is given that a conquering Deliverer will take His own armour and conquer the enemy. ***"He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head …"*** (Is. 59:17) It is speaking of the armour that the Lord Jesus Himself wore on earth and especially as He went to the Cross.

So the armour we are to put on is the armour that enabled the Lord Jesus to win. It has been given to us! We are in the same battle, with the same armour and victory is sure! The armour is a proven product. It can't fail. However weak the soldier is, the armour won't fail. The pieces must be put on daily. They must be used. They are not collector's items!

There are various parts of the armour – belt, helmet, breastplate, shield and shoes. All these protect us from various forms of attack. But there is a progression from defensive armour to all out attack with offensive weapons – the Sword of the Spirit and prayer.

Armour is defensive, but it gives offensive capability. During World War One European armies were bogged down in trench warfare. The power of the machine gun dominated the trenches. Finally, towards the end of the war, along came the tank (heavily armoured). It wasn't harmed by machine-gun fire and simply overran the trenches of the enemy in all out aggression. Good defensive armour enables us to attack aggressively.

The Belt of Truth: ***"Fasten the Belt of Truth"*** (Eph. 6:14)

Why is the belt mentioned first? The belt holds all the rest of the armour in place. 1 Pet. 1:13 has the same thought, ***"Prepare your minds for action"***. The Lord Jesus said, ***"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning"***. (Lk. 12:35) So to 'fasten on the belt' implies to get yourself in a state of readiness to go into immediate battle. It is a call to battle stations, a readiness to fight, a state of alertness.

Why the Belt of **Truth**? To enter the battle ignorant and doubting will to lead to defeat. Intelligence is really important. Putting on the Belt of Truth produces a state of alertness and firm confidence in the Truth. We have looked at some of the ways that Satan attacks us. Here are two main ways:

1. He sows doubts about the truth of God's Word.

Remember Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden. Doubt will paralyse you, cripple you and defeat you. Satan has been active sowing seeds of doubt particularly in the Muslim World. Muslims believe the Bible has been hopelessly corrupted and is not true at all.

So how do we defeat Satan in this area? Put on the Belt of the Truth of the Word of God. The Lord Jesus did this and He was victorious. His answer to Satan was, ***"It is written …"***.

The Truth keeps the soldier from being disorganised. To put on truth in this way means to allow the Word of God to be a living reality in our lives. We will live by it. We will act upon it. We will meditate on it. We will let it govern our conduct and our attitudes. So we need to soak (have a long lie in the bath) in the Truth of God. An occasional splash is not good enough!

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom." (Col. 3:16)

"Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You." (Ps. 119:11)

"Sanctify them through Your truth. Your Word is Truth." (Jn. 17:17)

"Be quick to listen … and humbly accept the Word planted in you that can save you. " (James 1:19-21)

Are we living under the control of the Word of God? If so, we will be ready when the attacks come. Live a life soaked in Scripture – read it, study it and meditate on it. Part of what it means to love God with all your heart, mind and strength is to love the Word of God.

"Oh how I love Your Law. It is my meditation day and night." (Ps. 119:97)

But note: The Bible is no magic charm to ward off evil (unlike the Qur'an). It is knowledge that must be acted on.

Two examples:

- In Acts 27 Paul is at sea in a great storm. Everyone is in great fear, panic, dread and confusion except for Paul! He had received an assurance from God – ***"I believe God"***. He had his Belt of Truth on and this enabled him to be calm and serene in the crisis.

- In 1 Cor. 13 it says, ***"Love thinks no evil"***. How easy to hear a carelessly spoken word (perhaps overheard) and then begin to brood on it and imagine a nasty critical spirit behind it – maybe assume it was a deliberate attempt to upset us. What is the consequence? The day is a write-off! Why? We are thinking evil! We don't have our Belt of Truth on.

2. He attacks us through the subtle temptation to lead a double life.

We find it easy to hide skeletons in the cupboard. It is easy to say one thing and do another or to argue that since everyone is doing it, why not me? God demands truth in the inward parts. You sometimes see great Christian leaders crumble and fail and leave the ministry. It is like deathwatch beetles eating away and in the end the hidden decay is revealed in collapse.

So to, ***"Stand with the Belt of Truth"*** implies: integrity, sincerity of heart, straightness, having a spirit of truthfulness, hating lies, hating impurity and hating crookedness. There is no place in the Christian life for the phony, for sham, for pretence or for insincerity. All that is unreal must be stripped away. James says, ***"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"***. (James 1:3)

People who have their eye on the main chance to get into the limelight so often spoil Christian work. Their secret goal is to be seen to be a success. This leads to expediency, opportunism, trampling on others, using others to gain reputation, making friends so they can use them etc. Such people deceive others because they themselves are deceived.

Are we living a double life? Usually it is nothing gross, but it is a separation between our private inner life and the life we project to others. There is a folly in 90% obedience!

Having on the **Belt of Truth** means being true and straight and honest even in the most private parts of your mind and life. David cried out for, ***"Truth in the innermost parts."*** (Ps. 51:6) So let God's Word search our hearts ruthlessly. We can't love God and be crooked. Let the Word of God squeeze out insincerity (living a lie) until it makes you absolutely true. Then you will be ready to stand.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate guards the heart, lungs and vital organs. If Satan gets at your heart and your ability to breathe (prayer) then you have lost!

Some of **Satan's tactics** in this vital area: he attacks with doubts and confusion and begins to make us doubt our own salvation.

Some examples:

- To young people: *"Oh, you are just passing through a 'religious phase'. We all did it! You will soon grow out of it."*

- *"It's all psychological! Conversion to this or that meets certain psychological needs. It's all in the mind. It's not real."*
- *"You're not good enough to be saved and have assurance of salvation! Are you claiming to be a saint?"*
- *"Look at your past! You have done some dreadful things! God won't forgive you all those sins. You will be punished."*

So many believers fear God as a great righteous Judge (and He is), but He is also a loving, kind, understanding Father and this they forget!

The defence against this sort of satanic attack is to put on the Breastplate of Righteousness. There are two parts to understanding the Breastplate – the front and the back. There is the righteousness of God that has been given to us (at the front) and our righteousness (at the back).

The Righteousness of God

For many believers, it is one thing to accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour, but quite another to understand how this puts them right with God. This is because they are hazy and confused about what happened to them when they asked the Lord Jesus to come into their life. Because of this confusion they are easy prey to the wiles of the devil.

Paul says, ***"Put on the Breastplate of Righteousness"***. This means to know, understand and accept that we are fully justified in the sight of God and we are accounted righteous in His sight. This is central to Paul's argument in Romans 3-5. In these chapters God says to us:

1. 'I am righteous and holy and men and women need to be made holy and righteous to come anywhere near Me. Because they are unrighteous and full of sin, they cannot appear before me.'

So the ultimate question is, "How do I stand before God?" We are not right with God. Is there anything we can do about this? God says, 'No!' ***"Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the Law; rather through the Law we become conscious of sin."*** (Rom. 3:20)

This is a very hard pill to swallow! No amount of anything we do, however hard we try, can earn us our ticket to heaven.

2. Justification doesn't mean somehow God will make up what is lacking in our own righteousness – a sort of 'top up' to enable us to meet God's standards. Many argue that religious duties and charity done in the best way we can, will be enough for God will top up our shortfall in some way. The Lord Jesus says, No! ***"No man puts new cloth in an old garment."*** (Mt. 9:16)

3. Some of us think God will have mercy on us if we are really contrite and sorry for what we have done. But this is not true! We are **not** saved because we are sorry for our sins. We are not saved because we repent! **Salvation is free! Salvation is completely unconditional!** We are not justified by what we **do**.
It is a gift of God! My Muslim friends find this impossible to understand. How can God justify (forgive) sinners and He Himself remain just, holy and righteous?

The Answer: Through Jesus Christ our Lord!! The death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross enabled God the Father to justify the ungodly and still remain completely just, holy and righteous.

We need to look at this in some detail. Here is just an outline.

- Scripture reveals God as Creator and Lawgiver. He expects us to obey His laws and be loyal and devoted to Him because He made us.
- But we have sinned and this has two consequences: **a broken law** (we are ashamed, guilty and fearful of God – see Gen. 3) and **a broken relationship** (we hide ourselves from God) and we are lost (unrighteous).

- To get right with God we need two things:
  - ✓ Something to happen to deal with the problem of our guilt and shame
  - ✓ Something to restore our relationship with God for we are now completely unrighteous.
- These two 'somethings' the Lord Jesus provides for us.

4. **Christ suffered – the just for the unjust**. The Lord Jesus stood as our substitute. He took our place in death. He took on Himself our sins, our guilt and our punishment.

Essential in all this is the **sinlessness** of the Lord Jesus. He **had to be** absolutely righteous and He was. The sacrificial laws in the Old Testament stressed that the animal to be sacrificed must be spotless and without blemish. Only a sinless one can take a sinner's place. But our sin is against an infinite God – a God who is infinite in holiness, righteousness and justice – so infinite that no finite being could stand in our place. For an atonement for all our sins to be real, there were two basic requirements: it must be made by a **man** who **never sinned**.

It must be made by an infinite being – God Himself – because He is unique and the only one able. So only the Lord Jesus – fully man and fully God – could atone for our sins!

But forgiveness of our sins (the negative side of the atonement on the Cross) is not enough! Our fellowship with God also needs to be restored. To be able to come into God's presence we need perfect righteousness – perfect holiness! The Lord Jesus has met this need! He not only lived a life of complete absence of sin, but He lived a life of positive righteousness. He fully and in every way demonstrated **all** the righteous and holy character of the Father. He fully did the will of the Father. He delighted to do it. It wasn't only obedience, but willing obedience with joy. The Lord Jesus lived a life on earth that was a delight to His Father and the Lord Jesus laid down His life on the altar (the Cross) for us. He substituted His love for our lovelessness – His obedience for our disobedience and His faith for our unbelief, ***"By the obedience of One. Many are made righteous"***. (Rom. 5:19) Now all that amazing righteousness of the Lord Jesus is reckoned to our account. It is 'imputed' righteousness. The righteousness of the Lord Jesus is 'imputed' to us – given to us.

That is how God forgives our sin. As He sees the righteousness of His dearly beloved Son in us, He immediately restores a full relationship with us. God did it all! No human or spiritual being can change this relationship – certainly not Satan. With the Breastplate of God's Righteousness on, you will never ever doubt your salvation. But more than this, you will be gripped by the glory and the reality of the justifying mercy of God in loving you, accepting you and welcoming you as a father would. This gives us a very great sense of security!

"***Now the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before our God. And <u>they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb</u> and by the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives unto death."*** (Rev. 12:10-11)

What about the back-plate – our righteousness? Satan attacks here as well. A typical attack: Demons say to us, *'That's fine! All your sins are forgiven forever, now you can live as you like!'*

[I've heard Muslims argue this in complete scepticism of our view of what the Lord Jesus accomplished on the Cross!]

God says, 'No! If you have been justified, you are dead to sin'. (Rom. 6:2-11) We are dead to all that is unrighteous, all that is evil and all that is unholy. Being justified means not only are we acquitted, but that acquittal means we are freed from the power of sin. It no longer has the power to control us.

So we have a Breastplate of Righteousness. Put on well, it will give you not only a great sense of security in the fact that you are loved and accepted by God as His child. But the Lord Jesus said, ***"By their fruits you will know them"***. (Mt. 7:17) So the Breastplate of Righteousness will empower you to die to self and enable you to live a holy and righteous life day by day.

In Ephesians we see our position in the Lord Jesus:

"Blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places." (Eph. 1:3)

Included in this is: redemption through His blood, forgiveness of our sins, adoption into His family and a glorious inheritance.

Paul prays that we will know how rich we are and also how **powerful** we are. (Eph. 1:18-19)

Paul is saying: 'Make this **real** in your own experience in your fight of faith.' All needed power is available for us to enter in and win victory after victory.

As an example: imagine you've been given a lovely house – a great house. It is yours. You have the legal papers. But when you get to the house to take possession you find squatters have taken possession and won't leave. You need to learn to **exercise** your legal rights and expel the squatters!

The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

"As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the Gospel of Peace". (Eph. 6:15)
[A new version has, ***"Let the shoes on your feet be the Gospel of Peace to give you a firm footing"***.]

The general emphasis of this passage is on **standing**. In order to stand you need a good pair of shoes to keep a secure footing - especially in face-to-face combat with the enemy. Shoes give **security, inner peace and stability** so we don't slip which may lead to disaster.

One of the tactics of the enemy is to take away our sense of peace and security – our shalom – our completeness.

There are many causes of instability in the midst of the battle. Here are a few:

- **Sin causes a loss of peace**. This is not only major sins, but issues like self-pity that come when it is tough going. The answer is immediate confession, leading to immediate forgiveness and an immediate restoration of peace.

- **Repeated failure**: we receive forgiveness but have no sense that victory over the particular sin is possible.

- **Personal distress** can rob us of our peace. Distress may be caused by events in the family or in the lives of friends and colleagues. It may be caused by impending unemployment or financial crises. In some countries it may be because of an increasing awareness of the security forces taking an interest in us. Sometimes we are robbed of peace by an accumulation of small things.

- **Worrying about the future** or about how to get guidance can rob us of our peace.

- **Multiple pressures** crowd in on our lives causing us to be 'frazzled' and robbing us of our peace and confidence.

- **More serious are feelings of being left alone by God**. We identify with, ***"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** Clearly this is a satanic attack, but still we feel very abandoned by God. (See Psalm 22)

- **A strange restlessness of spirit** may trouble us. We can't settle down to do anything properly and we jump about doing a lot but accomplishing nothing. There is a lack of stickability.

- **Sometimes there are strange, irrational fears**.

- **There can be oppressions of our spirit**.

Sadly, many believers suffer from deep feelings of insecurity and inferiority and this cripples them in the battle.

God's provision against these attacks: the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Notice: putting on the shoes doesn't stop the attacks, but it does help you **to stand** against them. Suddenly you will be aware of the peace of God flooding your heart and mind. With these shoes on

there will be no panic when attacked and no abandonment of our position. These shoes are designed to prevent us from getting "cold feet". Our sense of security is extremely important. It is one of our most powerful emotive needs. Lack of a sense of security tends to lead to personal breakdown and in society/culture to instability, crime etc.

There is a negro spiritual that goes something like this:

"I've got shoes. You've got shoes.
All God's children got shoes!
When we all get to heaven, going to put on our shoes
and walk all over God's heaven."

We do indeed have shoes, but we need to put them on **now**. How do we put on these shoes?

In Scripture there are two great illustrations of our need for security.

1. Elisha at Dothan in 2 Kings 6:8-17. His servant cried out, ***Alas, my master what shall we do?"*** Elisha had on his Shoes of Peace. He knew without seeing, ***"that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha"***. His servant didn't have 'his shoes' on and was overcome by a sense of panic.

2. Elijah facing Queen Jezebel in 1 Kings 19. He didn't have his shoes on – see v. 3, ***"Then he was afraid and he arose and ran for his life …."*** We are called to **stand**.

God has given us shoes so we will have a firm foothold and no assault of the enemy will be able to topple us. The assaults won't stop, but we will be able to stand.

Here are some things to remember:

- **God's provision of peace**

"Let the peace of God rule in your heart." (Col. 3:15)

The peace of God is already in your heart. It never leaves. Let it work. It is there to guard your heart and mind. When you are attacked by worry or a sense of panic, say to God's Peace, (remember He is our Peace) *'Go on Peace, you are in my heart. Take over. Guard my heart from this attack. Do your work. This is why you are in my heart.'*

An illustration from Pilgrims Progress:

Christian, Mistrust and Timorous came to the Palace Beautiful. But outside the gates there were lions roaring fiercely at them. They were afraid to go on. Watchful, the gateman, called out to them, *"Keep in the middle of the path and you won't be hurt for the lions are chained!"*

"And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:7)

Often we are in a situation we don't understand. Many factors are hidden from us. God's peace that surpasses understanding is given to us for all the problems and situations we don't understand.

- **God's Sovereignty**

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness; who publishes salvation. Who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns' " . (Is. 52:7)

And again, **"*We know that for those who love God, all things work together for our good – those who are called according to His purpose"***. (Rom 8:28)

Satan can do nothing in a believer's life except by the express permission of God. Even apparent tragedies can help further the Kingdom of God. Remember God's sovereignty.

- **The assurance of Our Heavenly Father's presence with us**

We might **feel** alone, but it is **never** true. There may be times of darkness when we can't pray, we can't sing or read the Bible. We are apparently forsaken. But God will never abandon us. He cannot!

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign … and His name shall be called Emmanuel (God with us)." (Is. 7:14)

Jesus said to His disciples, ***"Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*** (Mt. 28:20)

All may seem to be darkness and hopelessness but God is with us in the battle and His presence makes all the difference. At such times don't let Satan rob you of your joy for in His presence is fullness of joy. ***"You make known to me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of joy."*** (Ps. 16:11)

It is crucial to maintain joy in a crisis for, ***"The joy of the Lord is our strength"***. (Neh. 8:10) Paul and Silas sang for joy in prison in Philippi. Remember Paul in Corinth and apparently alone, ***"One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. 'Do not be afraid, keep on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you and no one is going to attack or harm yo, because I have many people in this city.' "*** (Acts 18:9-10)

- **Assurance of our Father's care and love**

1 Peter 5:8 speaks of the devil going around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We often feel we are the "someone". We remember that verse, but not the verse immediately before it, ***"Casting all your anxieties on Him <u>because He cares for you</u>."***

To me this is one of the most gloriously comforting verses in the whole Bible. His care for me and His love for me removes all sense of insecurity and brings peace and contentment. The love and grace of God can break into our deepest needs, our deepest problems, our deepest inhibitions and our inferiority complexes.

Look at the Book of Ruth and think about Boaz. He comes across as noble, generous, kind, good, honourable and (to Ruth) very lovable. Yet his mother was a Canaanite prostitute! Some psychologists would predict he would be a man with all kinds of complexes. But no, Boaz was formed by God's love. The grace of God had broken into his life and he was **transformed**. We can all be changed by the grace of God – transformed by the love of God. **Never** accept the demonic suggestion that you can't be changed.

Isaiah speaks of God's peace being like a river (Is. 48:18; 66:12). Rivers have many moods: bubbling gaily over rocks, fast currents, deep strong flows and long slow reaches crawling lazily along. So it is with God's peace. At times it is happy, fast, deep or slow. Even great disturbances are never enough to disturb the peace of God! Rivers flow around rocks and obstacles.

Recognise the completeness of our position in the Lord Jesus – far above **all** principalities and powers in the heavenly places. (Eph. 1:20-21) The victory is already ours and now we have to make it real in our own experience.

The Shield of Faith

"In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one." (Eph. 6:16)

The Shield of Faith is a central part of our defences. There are three pieces of armour before and three pieces after. It is the only one that is spoken of as having a special function. It can extinguish all the flaming darts/arrows of the evil one.

A shield can be moved to cover the whole body – feet, chest, head etc. It is the primary defence. The other pieces of armour reinforce the defence and afford double protection.

Roman infantry used big shields of a standard size so they could be interlocked. They were about 1.25m high and 0.75m wide. Our shield is faith! We need 'big faith' – 'standard' faith that can interlock with others.

- **The nature of the attack : the flaming arrows**

We have all seen western movies where the flaming arrows of Red Indians set ablaze the covered wagons of the pioneers. So these fiery darts are part of a surprise ambush. What characterises them is swiftness, unexpectedness, an immediate effect and being deadly and destructive.

Typical darts include: unbelief, materialism, legalism, judgmentalism, miserliness, bitterness, impurity, extremism, ego trips, perfectionist attitudes, ignorance, disunity, false priorities etc.

- **How do these attack the believer?**

The example of Job (see chapter 9)

Job is in a terrible situation (v. 13-24). He speaks to God. Clearly his mind is confused very deeply and very radically. So he says some terrible things about God – that He is not fair to punish him when he is guiltless. He finishes with, ***"If it is not He, then who is it?"*** Of course the answer is Satan! But Job thought it was God and he was devastated. He thought that his God whom he loved, honoured and obeyed had turned out to be a terribly unjust God after all!

Clearly a fiery dart had struck Job. He thought it came from God, but in fact, it came from Satan. Job says, ***"The arrows of the Almighty are sticking in me"***. (Job 6:4) Did this arrow come from God? No.

Sometimes ideas come into our minds that devastate us and leave a raging fire in our souls. We begin to doubt our salvation and our sanity. We doubt the goodness of God and even His very existence.

So a fiery dart is a sudden inner prompting from Satan. It is usually imperious in its demands and arbitrary and unpredictable in nature. It appears to make God a harsh and unlovely tyrant. Such is the confusing nature of the attack that it is difficult to discern its origin. We must ask ourselves, *'Who is saying this to us God or Satan?'* Don't obey every thought that comes into your mind for it may be from Satan. ***Test everything; hold fast to what is good"***. (1 Thess. 5:21)

A sad example

A young couple got engaged. They were sure God had brought them together. They loved each other and were well suited to each other. Both were dedicated to serve the Lord together. Suddenly the bride had a very strong feeling she should break off the engagement immediately. There was great turmoil and torment in the girl's heart, but she broke it off immediately and in breaking the engagement, she broke her heart!

But it was **not** God speaking. It was the nagging voice of Satan! When we get thoughts like this, we should share them with a few trusted believing friends we know well or our leader or pastor. Don't do anything precipitously! ***"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure"***. (Prov. 11:14)

God does speak to us, but He doesn't bulldoze us into immediate action. The voice of the Holy Spirit is gentle and full of sweet reasonableness. Other godly people who know us well should always confirm it. When trying to find guidance, be slow. Don't respond to impulses. Many have made a shipwreck of their lives in this way. The Lord Jesus said, ***"My sheep know My voice"***. (Jn. 10:27) It is a slow, quiet, lovely voice. There is no harshness – no nagging!

So fiery darts are not like ordinary temptations. Very often they come just **before** being used in God's service – before an evangelistic visit or preaching in a meeting. The fiery darts may be impure or even blasphemous, malignant thoughts. They may be ugly and sceptical thoughts. They may even come into our minds in the midst of worship times. What are we to do when they come?

Use the Shield of Faith!

Remember its size, ***"Take the Shield of Faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows …."*** Nothing can get at you **if** you have your shield of faith up!

How to use the Shield of Faith

Firstly, you must recognise you are under attack! This is very important. You won't defend yourself until you have recognised that Satan is attacking you. So the first thing is to recognise the possibility that 'the wild thought' may have Satan behind it.

Secondly, raise your shield of faith quickly. The fiery darts will come thick and fast, so quick action is needed.

What is this faith?

It is saving faith in the Lord Jesus – in His mighty accomplishments, in His death and resurrection and all its glorious implications for us. Faith is giving ourselves completely to the Lord Jesus. It is taking refuge in Him, leaning on Him, clinging to Him and resting in Him. It is faith in the mighty power and wisdom of the Lord Jesus and in Him alone.

Practically how do we do this? Affirm your love for the Lord Jesus and pledge allegiance again to Him. Affirm your love of and faith in the Word of God. ***"It is written …."*** Stand in the authority and the promises of the Word of God. Perhaps you know the song:

"Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
while the howling storms of doubt and fear assail.
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
standing on the promises of God."

So when we hear 'voices' telling us to do this or do that, we must ask ourselves if this is a **lying voice** or the voice of the Holy Spirit. Remember 1 Jn. 3:20, ***"Beloved, if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts"***.

It may help to use your imagination. The Lord Jesus is sitting in a chair in front of you. Remind yourself of all you know about Him and put the words of your sudden thoughts on His lips. See if there is any incongruity. You might find yourself saying, *"The wonderful Lord Jesus I love and know doesn't speak like that, with that tone of voice."* Then assert your faith in God and reject the lying voice.

When evil thoughts come, faith will tell you who you are in the Lord Jesus – a son/child of God – a royal priest with all the authority of God behind you. To change the analogy from a soldier to a policeman in your mind, raise your white glove and say, 'stop' to all evil thoughts that are trying to enter your mind. Wave on in all that is clean, pure and holy:

"Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil. 4:8)

That is raising up the Shield of Faith when the fiery darts come flaming towards us.

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet is there to protect the head – the mind, eyes, ears and mouth of the believer.

Some possible enemy attacks – particularly on our minds:

- **A Satanic attack that seeks to destroy our sanity**

It is really sad to hear of believers committing suicide. Why? I think a major part of the answer is satanic attack. Look at the example of King Saul in 1 Samuel. In his early life he held such promise. He had a fine physique. He was head and shoulders above his fellows. But through disobedience he opened the door to evil influences in his life. This led to the slow disintegration of his mind and his whole personality. He began so well and ended so tragically. The story of Saul needs careful analysis.

Not all mental disorder is the work of Satan, but some of it is. Paul said, ***"For we do not want you to be ignorant brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself."*** (2 Cor. 1:8)

Paul even despaired of life! We don't know what caused this despair. Quite probably it was an attack of Satan on his mind.

Again Paul says, ***"For even when we came to Macedonia our bodies had no rest. We were afflicted at every turn – fighting without and fear within."*** (2 Cor. 7:5)

I think this was another attack on Paul's sanity. Is this extreme? Remember that we are at war and our enemy is vicious, cruel and has no mercy. Satan will use every sort of foul way to destroy you. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

- **A Satanic attack to lead us on a tangent away from the truth**

"Now the spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and by teachings of demons." (1 Tim. 4:1)

We are in these days now. We must be careful. Never assume you are safe and immune from attacks of this sort. The Lord Jesus said, ***"… see that no one leads you astray. For many will come in My name ... and they will lead many astray."*** (Mt. 24:5)

It isn't hard to see this is happening in churches in the world today. There is so much wrong in our thinking. Our minds are easily manipulated by our environment: what we watch on TV and read in books, magazines and newspapers. Some time ago William Sargent wrote a book entitled, **The Battle for the Mind**. It is a secular book, but it is very interesting.

- **A sort of satanic brainwashing**

The 'principalities and powers' are determined to entrap the youth of every generation in every culture and this affects the life of all believers. There is an attempt to control us into 'loving the world systems' and ultimately becoming a slave.

We must always wear the Helmet of Salvation to guard against ***"the breakdown of our faith"***. (Jn. 16:1) So what is the Helmet of Salvation? I think it is a mind that is constantly preoccupied with thoughts of our great salvation. This mind is kept safe from all the assaults of the enemy.

A note of warning:

- ✓ Don't be preoccupied with constantly analysing your own spiritual state. Someone has said, *"You need to take ten long looks at the Lord Jesus for every glance at self"*.
- ✓ Don't be morbidly introspective.
- ✓ It is easy to believe that you are thinking about spiritual issues, but in reality you are taken up focusing on yourself.
- ✓ It is very depressing searching the recesses of our minds in an attempt at self-psychoanalysis.

Just from a pragmatic viewpoint there are many gloomy believers. They need to put on their Helmets of Salvation! When the Apostle John was on Patmos he was wearing his helmet and suddenly he was conscious of the greatness and the glory of the Lord Jesus. He heard Him say, ***"Fear not, I am the First and the Last and the Living One. I died and behold, I am alive for evermore and I have the keys of Death and Hades".*** (Rev. 1:18)

Think of Isaiah sad and discouraged at the death of King Uzziah who started so well, but died a leper! But then he puts his helmet on and in Isaiah chapter 6 he has an awesome vision of the majesty of God! This completely redirects his life.

How to put on the helmet in practice

Two things to do every day before going into battle:

1. Feed your mind carefully.

We have looked at Phil. 4:8. We must push out of our minds natural thoughts, natural considerations and natural attitudes and think about, ***"What is true …"***. We need to think more about the glory and

wonder of God's forgiveness and His greatness. A.W. Tozer wrote a book entitled **The Knowledge of the Holy**. It is a study of the attributes of God and how to apply the knowledge of these attributes to our lives. Think deeply and often of the accomplishments of the Lord Jesus in His death, resurrection and ascension.

Think often about the amazing mystery of new life, ***"If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation"***. (2 Cor. 5:17) Think about the wonder of being the sons and daughters of God. ***"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God."*** (1 Jn. 3:1) Think of world evangelism completed. Think of our future: "**Eternal glories gleam afar**". Catch a glimpse of what you will be – God's ultimate purpose – new heavens and a new earth. This is not escapism for we are pilgrims and aliens in this world. We are citizens of heaven. **So keeping our helmet on is keeping the vision of eternity before our eyes.**

2. Positively discipline your mind to do only the best.

This means prioritising our time. Often the great battle is not between good and evil, but between the good and the best. Often the best gets left undone because I am so busy doing good things. I don't have time to read good and interesting books until I have read the best. How do we evaluate what is best? Ask yourself if it meets God's priorities. These priorities are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom in every people group in the world
- To teach and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures in society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain/renew the life of the earth

I think different people are probably called to focus on different priorities. But practically, I think this is the order of our priorities. The highest priority is world evangelisation – every person, in every generation, in every culture, language and people group.

So a mind constantly preoccupied with thoughts of our great salvation and the purposes of God in this world is kept safe from all the onslaughts of the enemy. There are many other verses that are helpful. Meditate on Is. 26:3 and Phil. 4:7.

"You keep him in perfect peace whose <u>mind</u> is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock."

"And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and <u>your minds</u> in Christ Jesus."

The Sword of the Spirit

The sword is an attacking weapon and attack is often the best form of defence. We have been looking at the ways Satan can attack us. Now we learn how we can hit back. We will see that the attack against the principalities and powers comes in the context of 'ministry' – preaching, evangelism and worship.

What is *"The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God"* ?

It doesn't mean that it is merely a spiritual sword. Paul says, ***"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to destroy strongholds"***. (2 Cor. 10:3-4)

I think this means that the Holy Spirit in our lives uses this sword against the enemy. It is only when the Holy Spirit has freedom to work in us, when we have put our lives at His entire disposal – i.e. are Spirit-filled and Spirit-controlled – can we launch an effective attack against our enemies. The sword that the Spirit wields is the Word of God. You can't wield the sword unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Two points:

a) Learn to trust the Sword.

"The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow. It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. 4:12)

The Sword of the Spirit is powerful, but it is not those who wield the sword who make it effective. It has its own inherent living power. Attacking with the Sword of the Spirit is not so much what **we do**. It wields us rather than us wielding it. We don't control it. It will control us. Many of us fail to witness simply because we fail to recognise the power of this instrument that is in our hands. Remember, it is not always the first strike that kills the enemy. Keep fighting and don't give up.

b) Not 'Logos' but 'Rhema'

The Greek word Paul uses is *'rema'* /*'rhema'* which means 'a divine utterance'. So the sword we are wielding is not the Scriptures in a general sense – i.e. the whole Bible – but a 'word' God gives us in a specific and particular case of need. This is very practical, ***"When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say."*** (Mt. 10:19)

So at the crucial moment the Holy Spirit gives you a word (*'rema'* – a weapon) for you to use. The weapon (the word) is very often a word of Scripture we have previously read and stored away in our hearts. The Holy Spirit finds the right verse in our memories and uses it. [This is a reason to memorise Scripture, ***"Your Word I have hid in my heart that I might not sin against You"***. (Ps. 119:11)] We need a life in Scripture. As you read and study the Bible always pray that what you read will be stored up for use in the future. Learn to 'stockpile' your weapons in this way. Then the Holy Spirit will find the right verse or passage and use it with devastating effect.

Remember the example of the Lord Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Three times the Lord Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy and completely routed Satan. That is how to use the Sword of the Spirit. Put yourself in the hands of the Holy Spirit, then move out among people and God will give you the words to say.

How to use the Sword in combination with other parts of the armour

Note the word "take" (in the sense of 'receive') – a special word for an offensive weapon.

- **With the Belt of Truth**

We have seen Satan tempts us to doubt God's Word. In the Garden of Eden he asked, ***"Did God say ...?"***

Again he said to the Lord Jesus, ***"If you are the Son of God ..."*** . This was just after the Lord's baptism when God had said, ***"This is My Beloved Son."***

Satan attempts to secretly weaken our convictions based on Biblical foundations. The Belt of Truth will **protect** us. But with the Sword of the Spirit we can **attack** back with:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." (2 Tim. 3:16) or

"No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

- **With the Breastplate of Righteousness**

The attack comes on our assurance of salvation. We doubt that we are standing in the grace of God. There is an old saying: "**The shed blood makes us safe; the written word makes us sure.**"

Here again the Sword of the Spirit can attack back with, ***"These things have I written to you that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and by believing, you may have life in His name"***. (Jn. 20:21)

- **With the Shoes of Peace**

When Satan tries to discourage us and make us worried we need to read Is. 41:14-20 (especially if we feel as helpless as a worm!) or read Is. 49:1-7 (especially when we feel we are making no progress).

- **With the Helmet of Salvation**

When we are confused and sense our sanity is being bombarded or when a sense of meaninglessness grips our minds, use the promises of God. Quote out loud:

2 Tim. 1:7 when afraid

Mt. 6:31-33 when worried

Psalm 51 when feeling guilty

2 Cor. 12:9 when feeling inadequate

Using the Sword of the Spirit when carrying the war to the enemy

An example: Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost

Peter quotes Scripture. He takes the Sword of the Spirit and goes on the attack against those who had killed the Lord of Glory. He quotes from the prophetic Scriptures. What happens? They are devastated! ***"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart … and cried out, 'What shall we do?' "***

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, took the Sword of the Spirit and attacked the 'powers'. We 'attack' by preaching and speaking to others about the Lord Jesus. It is never a case of your mind and thoughts against those of another person. For no ordinary minds can wield a sword with the Holy Spirit's power. "***Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant …. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*** (2 Cor. 3:5-6)

The Weapon of 'All-Prayer'

We are in a battle and in battle it is extremely important to have clear lines of communication between ourselves and our great Captain of Salvation **–** The Lord Jesus. If communications break down the usual outcome is disorder and disaster. Our communication system is prayer!

The Lord Jesus is our great example of the use of this weapon. He was in prayer:

- ✓ When He was being baptised
- ✓ **After** works of healing
- ✓ Before choosing the 12 disciples
- ✓ After great achievements like feeding the 5000
- ✓ When He was very busy
- ✓ At His transfiguration
- ✓ In the upper room with His disciples
- ✓ In Gethsemane
- ✓ On the Cross

He left us an example to follow.

Prayer as an offensive weapon

- **It is to be used to defend <u>others.</u>**

The Lord Jesus said to Simon Peter, ***"Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail."*** (Lk. 22:31)

We need to pray for each other, for our families, for believing friends, for the work of God both locally and elsewhere and especially for unreached peoples. Pray regularly. It is often helpful to have a book with photos of those you pray for regularly.

- **It can be used in attack in strengthening the proclamation of the Gospel**

This is how Paul puts it, ***"Pray for me that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly."*** (Eph. 6:19))

- **Three** major **points about Attacking Prayer**

➢ **Always** (v.18 in prayer always)

"Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17) and in Luke 18:1-8 the Lord Jesus tells a parable to the effect that, ***"They ought always to pray and not lose heart"***. (The parable of the Persistent Widow and the Corrupt Judge)

How are we to be always in prayer? The New Testament doesn't give us any stated times of prayer. The Lord Jesus taught us – by command and by example – the duty, necessity and importance of times of prayer. But here I think Paul is speaking about 'the spirit of prayer' – 'an attitude of prayer'. Prayer is to be the quality of our lives. It isn't **how much** we pray or **how long** we pray that matters. The most important thing is **what we are** when we pray. **If we are not right with God, prayer is useless!**

What sort of life is a life of constant prayer? It is a life lived close to God – a life that is open – exposing all of our lives to the discipline of God's Word. It is a life that allows the Holy Spirit to kill everything in our lives that is foreign to the will of God. It is a costly way of opening ourselves to God's drastic surgery and being renewed and transformed by it. It is living as a 'living sacrifice' to God, holy and acceptable and it is a constant sacrifice.

God hears a life like that! This is the secret of the great giants of prayer who have really moved world evangelism forward by their prayers.

Just one example:

On Mount Carmel Elijah said just a one-sentence prayer:

"O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel …." (1 Kings 18:36-37) and then in v. 38, ***"The fire of the Lord fell"***.

It wasn't the length of the prayer that was important. It was his life that spoke to God. I think this is what Paul means by ***"praying always"***.

➢ **"Praying for all the saints"**

"Be on the alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." (Eph. 6:18)

I think this implies that we should not be **too** involved in praying for ourselves and our situation. The weapon of 'all prayer' is primarily to be used for others. Remember the priority given us in the Lord's Prayer – first the things of God, His honour, the glory of His name and the coming of His Kingdom, then **second** our personal needs.

Why is this important? Often the worst thing for us to do in prayer is to focus on our temptations, our limitations and our worries and fears. All this does is focus our attention on them! Perhaps this is why we so often get bogged down and find prayer depressing!

No! Seek to relate your battles to the great worldwide battle to see the Kingdom come on earth. Look around you. There are lots of others fighting and advancing. Look at the whole worldwide situation of the church. A few years ago Patrick Johnston wrote a book, **The Church is Bigger than you think**. It describes the explosive growth of the church in the world in the last fifty years.

So often we moan and groan about our failures and problems. But we need to look up, look around and get things in perspective. So relate your battle to the main battle. For example: in a church fellowship, maybe you are being attacked by awful temptations and then you discover another believer has a major

crisis at home and yet another is succumbing to discouragement. They have got weary in well doing. Yet another faithful member of the church is backsliding and falling away from the faith.

In isolation you don't see what is happening. Clearly there is a satanic attack on the whole Fellowship. So our prayer life is transformed – not, 'Lord help me', but, 'Lord help us'. ***"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the Law of Christ."*** (Gal. 6:2)

We need to share our battles and pray together for we are a 'fighting unit' (like a Roman cohort). It is only rarely that there is a personal attack. So learn to pray for the larger work.

- ***"And pray for me"*** **that the Gospel may be spread** (Eph. 6:19)

There is only one proven way for the Gospel to be effectively spread by believers right across the world. As westerners, we tend to focus on getting the correct **method**. The only one proven to work well is **sustained prayer by God's people**. Only prayer can really help in the spread of Gospel. Only prayer-saturated preaching produces results. Prayer works! So pray for pastors and church leaders. Perhaps it is even more important to pray for believers out in their jobs having regular contact with those who are not believers. Pray that they would witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Ultimate Victory of God

It is clear from the Bible that God has ordained **temporary** parameters around the freedom of both angelic beings and human beings and in addition there is **scope** for this freedom. In angelic society and in human society there is the ability to rebel freely against God. But one day this freedom will come to an end.

Out of integrity for the gift of freedom He has given, God endures for a time the anger of these destructive rebels. While the gift of life God gives to those who choose Him is eternal, the gift of freedom to choose against Him is not! A time is coming when God will end this present cosmic epoch by fully demonstrating throughout His cosmos (spiritual and physical) the victory He has already won through His Son.

For those who have used their freedom to enter into a covenant relationship with God our Creator, there is rapturous joy. The nightmare of the cosmic war will finally be over. Love will reign everywhere throughout all spheres of God's creation. There will be no more sin, no more pain, no more tears, hunger or death. All creation will be everything God created it to be, all God fought for it to be and all He died for it to be. The Lord Jesus promises that the sufferings of this nightmare war will be dwarfed by the joy of creation reaching its fulfilment when He, in all His love and glory, will reign. (Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 4:17-18; 1 Pet. 1:6-9)

God's victory concerns not only us humans but also the cosmic angelic beings. The whole of creation (physical and spiritual) now travails under the curse of the illegitimate tyrant who has seized it. The whole of creation will ultimately benefit when the 'god of this world' is toppled and creation is set free!

However, there are still battles to be fought for the fatally wounded Kingdom of Darkness still reigns on earth. The Cross and the Resurrection are, above all else, the act by which God vanquished Satan and all his demons. Our situation is the liberating result of this conquest.

Despite Christ's victory on the Cross, the New Testament still defines a believer's life in warfare terms. The **outcome** of the cosmic war is settled, but there are important battles still to be fought. Fighting them is what our lives are all about! As surely as the Lord came the first time to defeat His cosmic enemy and our oppressor in principle, He will certainly return again to defeat Him in fact.

Because sickness, disease, war, death, sorrow and tears are not God's will and He is the Almighty Sovereign Lord, we can be totally confident that some day God will end all sorrow and every evil that causes such sorrow. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. (Rev. 20:4) Paul wrote that when the Kingdom of God has fully and finally come the glory and the joy we will know will make the sufferings of this present world seem insignificant! Maranatha – Oh Lord come! (1 Cor. 16:22)

Conclusion

At the end of His life Paul wrote, ***"I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith"***. (2 Tim. 4:7) He is looking forward to God's smile, a great affirming welcome and the crown of righteousness God will give Him. On that day we too will realise it was all worth the fight!

So we are in a war against the principalities and powers and forces of wickedness. We can lose our first love. We can grow cold and lose heart. We have seen:

- We are in a life-long battle – spiritual warfare.
- It is possible to live an unhappy and useless life as a believer, but it is not necessary because God has provided us with defensive armour and attacking weapons. The Lord Jesus wore them and was totally victorious. He is offering to give them to us to use.
- We have to take the armour of God and put it on daily. Then we will experience victory. We must receive God's provision for battle.
- In battle we must obey the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord (those great angelic beings beyond count) – the Lord Jesus – in all the pressures of life. We must never lose contact with Him!

"Let the high praises of God be in their throats and the two-edged swords in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgement written. This is honour for all His godly ones. Praise the Lord!" (Ps. 149:6-9)

[Remember **we** are to be part of God's vengeance on the 'powers'. This is a great honour!]

"May you be strengthened with <u>all power</u> according to His glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:11)

Isaac Watts wrote:

My dear Almighty Lord,
My Conqueror and my King,
Thy matchless power and love,
Thy saving grace I sing.
Thine is the power. O may I sit
In willing bonds beneath Thy feet.

Then let my soul arise
And tread the tempter down.
My Captain leads me forth
To conquest and a crown
The feeblest saint shall win the day
Tho' death and hell obstruct the way.

Should all the hosts of death
And powers of hell unknown
Put their most dreadful forms
Of rage and mischief on;
I shall be safe, for Christ displays
Superior power and guardian grace.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His Glory with great joy; to the only God, Our Saviour, through Jesus our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time, now and for ever." (Jude 24-25)