

Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World

*Studies on the Armor of God
from Ephesians 6*

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Foreword

Welcome to this life-enriching seminar for men and women who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and others who may be seeking Him.

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Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

Round the clock news programs bombard us with the realities of a dangerous world climate. In our society and in others all over the world, we see the terrible results of man's pride and selfish inhumanity toward man. Sometimes it is difficult to discern the wise response to these problems; we only know we want to be a part of promoting good in our lives, society and world.

Ephesians 6:10-18 presents remarkable insights into how to effectively stand for good in this struggle between good and evil. The passage paints the picture of our being on a *spiritual* battlefield. Those evil forces we battle are not just people or institutions that fuel oppression or immorality. Behind these, Ephesians declares, is an unseen foe far more organized, powerful, cunning and cruel than we can imagine. This enemy is unaffected by human strategies and strength. He can only be defeated by God's power and God's armor. Ephesians 6:10-18, and indeed all of Scripture, instructs us to allow God, who is far more powerful than the enemies of good, to empower and arm us for the battle. If we do this, we are assured of victory.

So we launch this exciting study to gain a clearer understanding of how to allow God to equip us to stand with Him for good in our lives and in the world in which we live. As some ideas may be very new and perhaps hard to comprehend, continually ask God to give you clear understanding of the profound thought contained in this life-changing study.

Know the Enemy; Know Your Strength

To win a war, one must first be able to identify the enemy and understand his tactics. The obvious enemy in the battle for good is evil, which might simply be defined as that which is wicked and causes destruction and grief.

According to the Bible, a great cause of evil in the world is man's decision to live apart from God's leadership. This decision has led him to create a world system that encourages people to selfishly pursue such things as recognition, material possessions, physical lusts, and power (1 John 2:15-17). This has resulted in all manner of exploitation and callousness among people throughout history.

But the Bible tells us that from the beginning, the real cause of suffering in our world is not just oppressive, selfish or immoral people. Scripture as a whole, and Ephesians 6:10-18 in particular, emphasizes that the greater enemy behind evil and against good in our world are unseen wicked forces in the spiritual realm. The passage begins: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (6:11-12).

To many people in our materialistic, mechanistic, modern world, the belief in the supernatural or anything without a physical cause is becoming increasingly absurd. To many, the devil and evil forces of Scripture seem as far-fetched as ghosts and goblins. To others, the devil is not a being, but rather a metaphor representing all the evil in the world.

However, a careful study of the life and teachings of Christ in the gospels bring us to a crossroads. Jesus and the apostles actively dealt with demons,¹ and He spoke of the devil as a real spiritual being.² He taught us to pray to be saved from the evil one (Matthew 6:13). Because Christ proved His claim to be the Son of God when He rose from the dead, His teachings regarding the devil and demonic forces must be true.

Certainly, the devil, also called Satan, prefers to remain unreal to human beings. As terrorists today want to remain unidentified in order to strike at will, the devil would prefer not to be recognizable as the true enemy of good

in the world. In fact, while he is not omnipotent or omnipresent like God, he and his forces worldwide try to masquerade as God and seek to make people believe God or people are responsible for their evil works (2 Corinthians 11:14).

What else does the Bible say about this enemy and his tactics? According to Scripture, Satan is a created angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God.³ For this, he and his legions of followers were permanently cast out of the highest heaven where God is enthroned.

According to Genesis 2-3, Satan gained his foothold in our world when the first couple, created in God's image, fell to his subtle temptation to rebel against God. The penalty for this sin was death, or spiritual separation from God, for them and their offspring. Only the cross, where the sinless Son of God took on Himself the death penalty for man's sin, could break Satan's deadly hold on mankind (John 3:16; Romans 6:23).

While Satan was defeated at the cross, he still has influence over our world until Christ comes again to set up His kingdom on earth (Matthew 25:31, 41; Revelation 21-22). In the time he has left, Satan and his forces are organized throughout the world to seek to malign God's character and use people controlled by worldly thinking, false religion or self-focus to oppose God's redemptive will in the world. As for tactics, this enemy is extremely powerful, supremely cunning (6:11), has millenniums of experience, and feeds without conscience on deceit and violence.⁴

As Ephesians 6:10-12 identifies this great enemy, we learn three important facts. First, the major opposition in the battle for good is not people and institutions opposed to God's way, but rather shrewdly wicked, powerful and organized spiritual forces behind their opposition. Secondly, a battle against such forces will be ongoing, with no truce or quarter, until Christ's return. Finally, it is futile to face this enemy in our own strength or wisdom.

Ephesians declares that we must continually let the Lord empower and arm us with His strength and His armor to be assured of victory in the battle.

We will begin our study of *Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World* with the first key to victory: dependence on God. "Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (6:10).

1. a. How would you define evil in our world? (Feel free to use a dictionary.)

b. How would you define good?

2. a. Where do you see evil in the world and in people's lives?

b. What seem to be the causes of evil in our lives and in our society and world?

Reference: *Why Does God Allow Suffering and Evil?* p.96 .

3. a. Summarize what Psalm 37:3-8 instructs us to do in battle.

b. On whose side is God, and what will He do?

Psalm 37:17, 20

4. a. What do we learn about the greatest enemy of good in our world from Ephesians 6:10-12?

References: Note 3, *Satan*, p. 14, and Note 4, *Satan's character and schemes*, p.15.

b. How do the following verses describe this enemy and his tactics?

John 8:44 (Jesus speaking; cf. 10:10)

1 Peter 5:8

2 Corinthians 11:14

5. What is the first key to winning the battle for good against this foe?

Ephesians 6:10

Reference: Note 5, *Be strong*, p. 16.

6. a. While people cannot match Satan's strength, he and his forces are no match for their Creator. What do the following verses declare about Christ that makes Him the victor over the enemy?

Colossians 1:16-17

b. How did Christ destroy Satan's claim over His followers?

Colossians 2:14-15

7. a. We are instructed to "be strong *in the Lord*"(emphasis mine), or in our union with Him. According to Ephesians 2:6, what is the believer's position in Christ?

b. John Stott wrote, "They [powers of evil] were defeated at the cross and are now under Christ's feet and ours. So the invisible world in which they attack us and we defend ourselves is the very world in which Christ reigns over them and we reign with him."

According to this statement, why does our position "in Christ" give us superiority over the devil and his forces?

8. What did Jesus say about the importance of our union with Him?
John 15:5

9. a. The sense of powerlessness in the battles we face for good can either paralyze us with fear or leave us hopeless and defeated. What must be our mindset when we have these feelings?
Philippians 4:13

1 John 4:4b

b. What are we promised if we stay connected to the Lord in the battles for good in our lives and world?

2 Corinthians 2:14 (Romans 8:37)

10. The Bible records many incidents where God fought for His people when they faced humanly insurmountable odds. The following examples of these men demonstrate the power God gives those who depends on His power rather than their own.

David (1 Samuel 17:1-44). David, a shepherd boy, voluntarily fought a 9-foot Philistine giant named Goliath, whose armor alone weighed 125 pounds.

a. What did David, armed with only a sling and 5 stones, declare?

1 Samuel 17:45 (46-47)

b. What was the result?

1 Samuel 17:48-51

c. How is our battle with the enemy described in Ephesians 6:11-12 like battling a Goliath?

d. What brought David's victory?

Jehoshaphat. Review 2 Chronicles 20 where the armies of two nations had combined to overtake Judah and Jerusalem.

a. How did Jehoshaphat verbalize his dependence on God's strength for the battle?

2 Chronicles 20:1, 5-6, 12-13

b. What was the result? 2 Chronicles 20:14-17, 22-24

11. What have you observed about what total dependence on God brings about in the struggle against the enemies of good?

12. How do the following verses describe the certain protection and victory that come from choosing to *be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power*?

Psalm 18:2-3

Psalm 18:29, 35, 39

S U M M A R Y

13. a. What battles for good in your life and world are you most concerned about today?

b. What has this lesson shown you about God's place in these battles?

14. In the battles you are concerned about, you can release dependence on your own efforts and declare your trust in the power and wisdom of God. Perhaps you would like to take a moment to do this with each of those battles that concern you today.

A Final Note

Perhaps the concept of Christ's death on the cross to take away your sin (Colossians 2:13-15) and of being united with Christ (John 15:5) are new to you. Revelation 3:20 says that Christ stands at the door of each person's heart and knocks. John 1:12 and 3:16 promise that those who open the door to Him become God's own children and have eternal life. If you would like to receive Him into your life now, the following prayer may be helpful to you:

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. I want to be united with you as I fight the battles for good in my life and world.

If you sincerely prayed this prayer, record this day in your Bible. Christ has come into your life as He promised and will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5b).

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *Jesus Christ's recorded dealings with demonic forces:* Matthew; 8:29, 32; 9:33; 15:28; 17:18; Mark 1:24, 26, 34; Mark 3:11; Luke 4:2-13; 41; 8:2; Luke 22:3; John 14:30-31. Apostles: Acts 5:16; 16:18; 19:12, 15f.

2 *Jesus Christ's teachings and references to the devil as a real being:* Matthew 6:13; 12:24-26; 13:19; 16:23; 25 31,41; Luke 10:18; 11;20; 13:16; 22:31-32; John 8:44; 12:31-33.

3 *Satan* means “the accuser.” He is also called *the devil* (4:27). While Satan and evil adversaries, or demons, are incredible to some, it is important to understand what the Bible has to say about them. In the Gospels, Jesus delivered people from demons in numerous incidents. The Bible refers to Satan as an angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God. Consequently, God cast him out of heaven with his rebelling host of angels (2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9; Isaiah 14:12-15). Under Satan’s leadership, these angelic beings became known as demons, and are organized in their schemes and attacks on human beings (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his forces work to get people to worship Satan (Luke 4:7) and to prevent individuals from turning to God (Luke 4:8). Satan’s defeat is promised in Genesis 3:15 and was completed at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). In the resurrection, Christ was victorious over Satan and his power. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the permanent ruler of the whole world. Satan is still a force to be

reckoned with until Christ returns to judge the earth (Matthew 16:27). Satan is the temporary ruler of the part of the world that chooses to follow him. James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil (or demonic forces) by continually surrendering to God's leadership in their lives.

It is important to understand that Satan is a created being, not eternal like God. He is limited in his knowledge and activity. He is not all-knowing, all-powerful or everywhere present. He does not know your thoughts. But he and his organized helpers span the globe and imitate God's omnipresence and omnipotence. He masquerades as an angel of light, or truth (2 Corinthians 10:14), to lead people astray in false religions and ideas or to make it appear God is responsible for his evils. **Recommended reading:** *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis; *Satan's Whispers*; *Breaking the Lies That Bind* by Robert Don Hughes.

4 *Satan's character and schemes.* While the enemy does not have run of the highest heaven where Christ is seated at the Father's right hand (Ephesians 1:20) and where believers are seated with Christ (2:6), he and his forces do move freely about the rest of creation or "the kingdom of the air" as it is called in Ephesians 2:2. In Daniel 10:13, 13; cf. 20, the archangel Michael said he fought the prince of the Persian kingdom for 21 days. This is an example of the organization of demonic forces described in Ephesians 6:12. The enemy has a defined and disciplined chain of command. The implication is that Satan is terribly powerful, but he is not nearly as powerful as God. In His inscrutable arrangement, God has allowed Satan to temporarily dominate and drive the world, which on the whole is separated from God's grace. Though the Devil can only be in one place at a time, with his myriads of malignant spirits he imitates God's omnipresence and omnipotence. He and his officers are well-schooled and well-placed in the secular and ecclesiastical cultures of the world to best spread their cancer. In 1 John 5:19, John states, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the

glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Jesus commissioned Paul "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18)

We see the enemy in the amoral and immoral media of the West and through murder and cruel oppression around the world. But even individuals who have gone so low as to be serial murderers do not equal Satan's evil. Satan has no conscience, no compassion, no remorse, no morals. He feeds on pain and anguish and filth. There is nothing in Satan that is redeemable: no virtue, but only a dark, cannibal void.

Along with this, he is supremely cunning (Ephesians 6:11). He has had multiple millennia to study and master human subversion and is the ultimate manipulator. He specializes in mixing enough truth with falsehood to make it seem plausible, just as he did with Eve in the garden (Genesis 3). Twisting the truth to heresy is his specialty. He may trap an individual in sensuality or pull him/her down by instilling doubt about God's goodness or goodness toward him/her. Satan works invisibly, shrewdly and in a way perfectly tailored to the victim. He is evil beyond our comprehension and without conscience or principle. He is subtle and powerful. He hates Christ, God's children and the Church. So Paul writes: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood." From R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, pp. 216-218.

5 Be strong (6:10). "Paul takes the Greek as a passive, 'be made powerful.' A person cannot strengthen himself; he must be empowered, and that not once for all but constantly, as the tense of the Greek indicates. Furthermore, he says not 'by the Lord', though that would be true enough, but again *in the Lord*. When life is lived in union with Him, within the orbit of His will and so of His grace, there cannot be failure due to powerlessness (1 John 2:14). Apart from Him the Christian can do nothing (John 15:1-5), but there is available all the *power of His might*. This refers to God's resources of prevailing triumphant power." Frances Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, pp. 170-171.

Keys to Victory in the Battles:

**Depend on God's Strength*

**Wear His Armor*

Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
Boots	Gospel of Peace
Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	God's Word

**Pray*

Lesson 2

The Belt of Truth

In Lesson 1, we saw that the first key to winning the battles for good in our lives and world is dependence upon God and His strength. Victory over evil human powers and far greater cosmic powers described in Ephesians 6:11-12 is not possible in our own strength and logic. But victory is assured if we put aside dependence on ourselves and are made strong through our union with Christ. To trust in His strength and not our own in the battle is to "be made strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (6:10).

Next, Ephesians 6 tells us victory is assured as we wear God's armor in the battle. "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:11,13).

The apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians while in prison. He had seen many Roman soldiers and may have even been chained to one as he wrote. As he looked for ways to communicate the Christian's way to victory in the

struggle against evil, he was reminded, perhaps by these soldiers, of the armor of God described in Isaiah (11:5; 52:7-8; 59:17). Paul then began to compare six necessary pieces of Roman armor with God's armor that He places on us as we fight alongside Him for good in our lives and world. This heaven-crafted armor that gives supernatural strength in the battle (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) includes *truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God*. A seventh non-clothing item, *prayer*, completes the outfit that equips us for spiritual battle.

Although we will look at each of these separately, it is important to see the "armor of God" as a whole. As a soldier would never go to the battlefield without any one piece of armor, we must "put on the full armor of God" to be assured that *we will stand and be victorious*.

Paul says, "Stand firm, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist" (6:14). Before going into battle, the Roman soldier would first put on his belt, which would draw up his loose tunic and hold his sword and everything else in place.

Paul is teaching that truth performs this important function in the battle for good. It is truth that holds our spiritual armor in place and protects us from deadly entanglements with the lies of the enemy.

While many Western philosophers currently promote the idea that there is no absolute spiritual truth, most people of the world would disagree. As they get up in the morning trusting that the physical law of gravity will get their feet to the ground, people also believe there is truth in the spiritual realm. Some believe they know the truth, while others are confused and uncertain. But most people believe that just as there are physical truths, there are spiritual laws regarding God and others that apply to all people, all circumstances and for all time.

A simple definition of truth might be "that which corresponds to reality." To tell the truth is to "tell it like it is." Because finite man is limited in his ability to see truth regarding our relationship with God and others, truth might further be defined as the reality God sees.¹

Traditional Christian faith believes that the truth is found in the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became a man and expressed God's truth to us. The Christian faith is unique in that it is not just rooted in subjective feelings or the revelation of one person, but rather in the historicity of the Scriptures and of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both the Old and New Testament documents pass objective secular historical and literary tests for accuracy.² In other words, historical evidence supports the validity of Christ's claim to be the Son of God and Scripture as God's revelation of truth to man.

Therefore, as the Christian puts on the belt of truth, he can reasonably embrace biblical revelation as God's truth -- truth about God, ourselves, history and the future. Jesus said to those in bondage to false teaching, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). His prayer for all who would follow Him was, "Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth" (John 17:17). The truth of God's Word can free us from entanglements and bondage to lies and distortions of the truth.

To put on the belt of truth also refers to living a life of sincerity and honesty. As simple and noble as this may sound, only God can enable us to be truly honest people. We are easily captivated by Satan's lies, which often sound so true, and by deceit, hypocrisy, scheming or manipulation as a means of getting our way.

Putting on the belt of truth, then, refers to filling our minds with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. It also means letting God's Spirit continually search our hearts and root out any dishonesty and hypocrisy in our lives. As we seek to know and live by God's truth, He will make us authentic

people, set free from the lies of the enemy. With a clear conscience, we are ready to face anything the enemy brings in the battle for truth.

1. a. What are we commanded to do in order to win the battle for good in our lives and world (Ephesians 6:11a; 13)?

b. Why is it important to see the armor of God as a whole rather than in parts?

2. a. What is the first piece of equipment mentioned (6:14a)?

b. Why is the belt essential to the soldier, and what does this suggest about truth in our lives?

3. a. How would you define truth?

b. What does knowing the truth enable us to do in a given situation?

4. What is the opposite of truth, and what does this cause?

5. What do the following declare about God and His Word, as found in the Scriptures?

Psalm 18:30

Psalm 111:7

6. a. What did Jesus declare about the Scriptures and His own words?

Luke 21:33

John 18:37

b. In addition to the many miracles of Jesus, what historical event did Jesus predict (Matthew 16:21) that proved His claims?
1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (cf. Luke 24)

Note: Throughout the study, all references in parentheses () are optional reading.

c. What truth did God give mankind through His Son's incarnation (life on earth)?
John 1:1,14 (Hebrews 1:3)

John 14:6 (3:16)

7. a. What do the following passages suggest we do with the truth as revealed in the Scriptures and in Christ?
Psalm 1:2

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

b. What is the result?

Psalm 1:3, 6

Psalm 119:105

8. How does God view deceit?

Psalm 101:7

Proverbs 12:22

9. a. What characterizes those who reject and arrogantly defy God's truth?

Psalm 36:1-3 (Isaiah 59:4)

b. Where does refusal to acknowledge God's truth ultimately lead?

Romans 1:21-22, 25 (28-32)

10. a. To gird ourselves with truth is not only to know truth but to actively seek to live a life of integrity. What does God's Word clearly command?
Zechariah 8:16

Leviticus 19:11

b. What guide has God given us in understanding and practicing truth?
John 14:15-17 (16:13a)

Reference: *Holy Spirit*, p. 26.

11. a. Why do we experience a continual battle within over our integrity, and what is the key to winning this battle?
Galatians 5:16-17

Ephesians 4:30-32

b. What must be our continual prayer in order to grow in integrity and knowledge of the truth?
Psalm 86:11

S U M M A R Y

12. Why is truth important in our lives and in our world?

13. a. How would you define the “belt of truth” referred to in Ephesians 6?

b. What does it mean to put on the belt of truth in the battles for good that most concern you right now in your life and world?

14. The enemies of good fight with lies, deceitful scheming and hypocrisy. What does God promise if we do not respond in kind, but rather face these battles truthfully and sincerely with faith in God's Word?

Final Note

If you are unfamiliar with the historical evidence regarding the reliability of the Scriptures and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, take some time to read one or more of the books referred to in Lesson Note 2.

LESSON 2 NOTES

1 Art Lindsley, *True Truth*, p. 19.

2 Suggested Reading: Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter*.

3 *Holy Spirit*. God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity; three divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), all with the same essence of deity. The Holy Spirit, known as the third person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Christ (John 1:12; 14:16-17; Romans 8:9). The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit not as an *it*, but rather as a *He*, a distinct personality. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit brings about regeneration or spiritual birth in the believer. While the Holy Spirit cannot be seen, we can see the evidence of His work (3:8). When we ask God (Luke 11:13) to “fill” us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as “Christ in you” (Colossians 1:27b). See also Note 3, *Knowing the Holy Spirit*, p. 91.

Keys to Victory in the Battles:
**Depend on God's Strength*
**Wear His Armor*

Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
Boots	Gospel of Peace
Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	God's Word

**Pray*

Lesson 3

The Breastplate of Righteousness

So what keys to victory have we examined thus far in our study on *Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World*? The first is dependence on God's strength and not our own in the battle. The enemy is far too powerful for us to beat in our own strength and logic. We must "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10). This means staying united with Christ and allowing Him to empower us.

The second key is that we must wear *His* armor in the battle. Although we are studying the different parts of that armor, it is important to remember that we must wear the *full* armor -- all of it -- all of the time. This allows us, like a soldier in the battle zone, to be ready to protect ourselves and to take ground when the enemy attacks.

To stand firm first requires girding ourselves with the belt of truth -- filling our hearts with the truth of God's Word and seeking to live honestly and

sincerely. After this, we must have *the breastplate of righteousness in place* (Ephesians 6:14b).

In battle, the Roman soldier's breastplate was made of metal or chain mail and covered him from neck to waist in front and sometimes also in back. This piece of armor protected his vital organs, especially his heart. This is what the breastplate of righteousness does for us spiritually.

In Isaiah, the Lord is described as going forth into battle to destroy His enemies. "He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head" (59:17). It is this breastplate of righteousness, His own righteousness, that He places on us to protect our hearts in the struggle against evil.

This breastplate of righteousness refers to the promise that God *declares* us righteous when we receive Christ as our Savior (Romans 3:21-26). When we place our faith in Him, Scripture tells us that the righteousness of Christ is imputed (credited or transferred) to us in exchange for our *unrighteousness*, which was imputed to Christ on the cross.¹ When we turn from going our own way apart from God, and place our faith in Jesus Christ's provision for our sin, God declares us not guilty and clothes us with Christ's perfect righteousness. With this comes the assurance of forgiveness of our sin and acceptance before God as a child in His family (John 1:12). One writer describes it thus:

*Because the sinless Savior died
My guilty soul is counted free,
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on Him, and pardon me.*

This righteousness received through faith in Christ also allows God to begin building righteous living and righteous character into our lives. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, God works in our hearts to produce Christ-like love and sincerity that attracts others to Him. In this way, we become the Lord's ultimate offensive weapon in the battle for good.

While we have been declared righteous, it is crucial that we keep short accounts with God, confessing and forsaking sin when He reveals it to us. Otherwise, we are left unguarded against Satan, who is intent on destroying us (1 Peter 5:8).

We must be especially careful not to let pride and self-righteousness creep into our lives as we stand for what is good. It is easy to begin equating fighting for right with being righteous.² The Christian's righteousness before God is never earned through good works or knowledge, but always through God's grace in the cross of Christ. As we keep this at the forefront of our minds, we maintain the humility that reflects Christ to others.

In summary, the breastplate of righteousness is our assurance as believers that we have been declared righteous and stand before God forgiven and accepted. The breastplate of righteousness is also the righteous character that grows as we allow God's Spirit to control our lives. The reflection of Christ's goodness in our lives draws others to His love, making us a strong offensive weapon in the battle for good.

1. a. Ephesians 6:14 introduces the second piece of the armor of God that allows us to stand firm in the battle for good. "Stand firm, then, with the breastplate of righteousness in place" (Ephesians 6:14b). Why is the breastplate essential for the soldier in battle?

b. What does this suggest about righteousness as a part of our spiritual armor?

2. a. How does Isaiah 64:6 describe our righteousness apart from Christ?

b. Why is this true, according to Romans 3:23?

3. The righteousness in God's armor that we are to wear in the battle against evil is not our own, but His. It is mentioned in Isaiah 59:17. "He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head..." What does Psalm 89:14 say about God's righteousness?

4. a. God places His righteousness on us when we place our trust in Christ's salvation. How are we made right with God (justified) and declared righteous? Romans 3:22-24

Reference: Note 1a, *Justification*, and Note 1b, *Redemption*, under "Why Did Christ Have to Die on the Cross?" p. 37.

b. How does Paul describe his experience of receiving God's righteousness? Philippians 3:8-9

5. a. When we place our faith in Christ, His righteousness is *imputed* (credited or transferred) to us in exchange for our unrighteousness, which was imputed to Christ as He died on the cross to take away our sin. How does 2 Corinthians 5:21 describe this extraordinary truth?

b. What does the cross unequivocally prove to us?

Romans 5:8

6. What is the reasonable response to such a gift?

2 Corinthians 9:15

7. a. After putting on the imputed righteousness of Christ through faith in Him, how does God begin to produce righteous living and character in us?

John 14:15-17

Ephesians 3:16, 20

b. What does God produce in us as we invite His Spirit to control our attitudes and actions?

Philippians 2:13

1 Corinthians 2:16

Galatians 5:22-23

Reference: Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 26, and Note 3, *Knowing the Holy Spirit*, p. 91.

c. When the Spirit controls our lives, what can we declare as we face evil forces?

1 John 4:4b

8. Because of our sin nature (Galatians 5:16-17), we will often take back control of our lives through sin (a disobedient act or attitude). How can we once again allow God's Spirit to control and empower our lives?

1 John 1:9

Note: To confess involves turning (repenting) from our sin as we: (1) call it sin (2) call it forgiven through the cross, and (3) call on God to change us.

9. a. How does Micah 6:8 simply describe righteous living?

b. What choices allow us to continue to grow in righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit?

Romans 13:14

Ephesians 4:23-24

Ephesians 5:2a

Ephesians 5:8-11

10. **Optional Question:** In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, the apostle Paul describes his and his co-workers' experience on the spiritual battlefield for good. He writes:

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Underline the phrases in this passage that describe Christian integrity that draws others to Christ?

Reference: *Qualities of the Righteous from Proverbs & Psalms*, p. 37.

11. The apostle Paul wrote the following toward the end of his life:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy: 1:15-17

Regardless of his vast spiritual knowledge and incredible ministry, what attitudes did Paul demonstrate that proved he still depended on Christ's righteousness and not his own?

12. What promise of God can those who wear His breastplate of righteousness always remember?

Psalm 37:39-40

S U M M A R Y

13. When and how does God place His breastplate of righteousness on you?

14. How is righteous living developed in your life from day to day? What part does the Holy Spirit play, and what part do you play in this process?

15. a. Why is it important to confess and forsake sin as God points it out in your life?

b. How does He respond when we do this? (Review Question #8.)

c. Is there any area where you would like to do this right now?

16. a. What do you feel are the most important manifestations of righteous living that you have observed in this lesson?

b. How does this make us an offensive weapon of the Lord on the battlefield for good?

A Final Note

If you have never asked Christ to fill, or control and empower you with His Spirit, perhaps you would like to ask Him for the first time now. The following is a suggested prayer that you can pray daily:

Lord Jesus, I acknowledge that I have failed to live the Christian life in my own strength. Thank you that you have forgiven my sins through your death on the cross for me. I now invite you to take control of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as you have commanded me to be filled and as you promise to do if I ask. Live your life through me, Lord, in the power of your Spirit. I pray this in the name of Jesus.

Optional Study:

Qualities of the Righteous from Proverbs & Psalms

Proverbs 10:11

Proverbs 15:28

Proverbs 20:7

Proverbs 28:1

Proverbs 29:6-7

Psalms 37:21

Psalms 37:39-40

LESSON 3 NOTES

1 "Why did Christ have to die in my place?" This is one of the most important yet least understood questions of the Christian faith. The following explanations of various biblical terms answer this question:

a. *Justification* refers to God declaring us "not guilty" and righteous in his sight, even though we are guilty of sin. God is able to do this because of the life and death of Jesus Christ acting as man's substitute. When God declares a person righteous in His sight, He does so on the basis of the life and death of the One who was acting on his behalf. "Jesus our Lord...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:24-

25). When we put faith in Jesus Christ to save us from sin, God declares us justified, or not guilty, and righteous. We are justified by the death of Christ which paid the penalty for our sin, and we are justified by the life of Christ whose life of righteousness is also credited to us. This justification, which is all by God's grace and received by faith, brings us into fellowship with God as a child in His family.

b. Redemption is a biblical word meaning "to buy out" or "to set free by the payment of a price (ransom)" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. Romans 3:24 says we are "justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus." As born sinners, we are in the slave market of sin, so to speak. But Christ, the only free man who ever lived (because He was sinless), paid the ransom price of His own blood to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin and set them free to become sons of God. Only by the price of death can one be set free (Romans 6:23), and only one who is free (sinless as Christ was; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21) can buy a slave's freedom. By paying the ransom price of His shed blood, Jesus purchased the person who puts faith in Him out of the slave market of sin and sets him free to become a son of God (Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Gal 4:4-5).

c. Propitiation is a biblical word meaning "satisfaction" and refers to the righteous demands of God being satisfied." God will not compromise His attributes of righteousness and justice which are legitimately outraged by man's deliberate violation of His will. But God's attribute of love motivated Him to provide a way to bring man back into fellowship with Himself *without compromising* His attributes of absolute righteousness and justice. God's holy character demanded that man's sin be paid for. Therefore, God came into the world in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because Christ was born without sin and never committed an act of sin, He qualified to bear the holy wrath of God due the human race as He willingly died on the cross for our sin. In so doing He "satisfied" the just demands of God's holy character against man's sin. This act set God's love free to pour out grace on those who receive His

gift of salvation. In this way, God is "just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). See a. *Justification* above.

d. Reconciliation means "to change a person from enmity to friendship." The Bible says that man is born at enmity with God. Sin erects a barrier between man and God because of a sense of guilt in man. This guilt puts him at odds with God. Reconciliation is the aspect of Christ's death on the cross which removed the barrier of man's sin and its consequences and thus took away guilt which caused enmity against God. Christ's death on the cross removed every barrier between a holy God and sinful man. Reconciliation is available to all men, no matter how sinful. While reconciliation is available and sufficient for everyone, only those who accept the gift of this reconciliation personally by faith receive it. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10).

2 Art Lindsley, *True Truth*, pp. 34-44.

Keys to Victory in the Battles:

**Depend on God's Strength*

**Wear His Armor*

Belt

Truth

Breastplate

Righteousness

Boots

Gospel of Peace

Shield

Faith

Helmet

Salvation

Sword

God's Word

**Pray*

Lesson 4

Gospel of Peace Boots

Having instructed us to gird ourselves with the belt of truth and sheath ourselves with the breastplate of righteousness, Paul continues: "Stand firm then...with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:14-15).

In battle, the Roman soldier wore a leather half-boot. It had opened toes with heavily nail-studded soles and leather straps which tied around the ankles and shins. The studs worked like cleats on football shoes, giving the soldier mobility for marching and a solid footing in combat.

Paul is suggesting that stability in the battle for good in our lives and world comes from the peace provided by the gospel of Christ. This could be the supernatural peace *with* God that comes from accepting Christ and the peace

of God that we have because He is with us in the battles of life. It can also be viewed as a steadiness that comes from always being ready to share the gospel of Christ with others.

The first perspective is peace *with* God. Life apart from God holds a "general sense of alienation and a raging awareness that life is not right."¹ When we receive Christ into our lives, a wonderful peace comes from knowing we are accepted by God because of our faith in His Son, not our performance. This peace *with* God gives us stability.

Once we establish our relationship with Christ, we then experience the peace *of* God. This is a peace that comes from knowing that our loving heavenly Father is in control and will ultimately give us victory as we trust Him in any battle that we face. Jesus promised this peace when He said, "My peace I give you" (John 14:27). It is an unexplainable sense that all will be well because of God's love, proven by Christ's death for us.

It is important to note here that we can easily lose this peace *of* God through neglect of our relationship with Christ or rebellion. Then when things get tough in the battle, we lose our footing and may fall, panic and run, or become a burden to our fellow warriors. When this happens, peace can come again if we simply reopen our communication with God.² His Word tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Finally, sure footing in the battle comes from being ready to share the gospel of peace in Christ with others. Even while we are struggling against the enemy in the battle, the greatest joy can come from continuing to reach out to those who don't know Christ's love. John Stott writes: "The devil fears and hates the gospel, because it is God's power to rescue people from his tyranny, both us who have received it and those with whom we share it."³

Peace with God, the peace of God, and readiness to share the gospel of peace can all be part of what it means to put on the gospel of peace boots. As we continue our study of *Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World*, we will observe each of these elements.

1. a. What was the importance of the nail-studded half-boot that the Roman soldier wore in battle?

b. What does this suggest about the Christian's war boots described as "readiness that comes from the gospel of peace"?

Ephesians 6:15

2. a. What can cause a lack of peace in life?

b. Apart from Christ, where do people seek peace and sometimes find it briefly?

c. Why is this peace ultimately insufficient?

3. a. Why is the peace we find when we put our faith in Jesus Christ deeply fulfilling?

b. What do the following verses suggest?

Romans 5:1

Note: *Justified* means “made right with God.” See Note 1a, p. 37.

Romans 8:1

Romans 8:15-16

1 John 5:11 (12-13)

4. What did Jesus promise regarding peace?

John 14:27

5. a. What does Philippians 4:6-7 instruct us to do in order to experience this peace?

Reference: Note 4, *The peace of God, Philippians 4:7*, p. 49.

b. What does Philippians 4:6 suggest can rob us of Christ's peace?

c. In the battles of life, what peaceful assurances come from maintaining an intimate and dependent relationship with the Lord?

Psalm 23:1, 3-4, 6

6. According to the following verses, what responsibilities do we have as members of God's family?

Matthew 5:13-16

II Corinthians 5:18-20

7. What is the source of power for this great task?

Acts 1:8

Reference: Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 26, 91.

8. What important components of being a good ambassador for Christ are mentioned in the following?

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12a

2 Timothy 2:23-25

1 Peter 3:15-16

9. What encouragement do the following passages give us as we as we pray for those we desire to know Christ personally?

Mark 10:27

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (1)

10. Jesus told us what to expect as His ambassadors. He said, “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:20). What must we remember when we are misunderstood or mistreated for our faith?
Matthew 5:11-12

1 Peter 5:7

Romans 1:16

Note: “Satan wants us to think that telling others the Good News is a worthless and hopeless task—the size of the task is too big and the negative responses are too much to handle. But the footgear God gives us is the motivation to continue to proclaim the true peace that is available in God—news everyone needs to hear.” *The NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 2142.

11. What does God promise as we continue to keep our gospel boots strapped on? 1 Corinthians 15:58

Galatians 6:9 (Psalm 126:5-6)

S U M M A R Y

12. a. How can you have peace *with* God, and what is wonderful about this peace?

b. How does peace with God give you firm footing in the battles of life?

13. a. What produces the peace *of* God, or the peace *of* Christ, in your life?

b. What can rob you of this peace in the issues you are facing today?

c. What can you do to restore and maintain this peace?

14. a. “Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15) refers to being motivated and ready to tell others the Good News of peace with God through Jesus Christ. How does this allow you to hold your ground and take ground from the enemy in the battle for good in our world?

b. What principles of effective sharing of the gospel stand out to you from this lesson?

c. What does God promise as you seek to be a faithful witness for Him?

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, p. 233.

2 John Stott, *God's New Society*, p. 280.

3 R. Kent Hughes, pp. 233-234.

4 *The peace of God, Philippians 4:7*. "the word behind this is shalom: 'completeness, soundness, welfare.' The great German Old Testament scholar Gerhard Von Rad, in a oft-quoted essay, says it means 'well-being.' Thus we can paraphrase Jesus' words as, 'Peace and well-being I leave to you; my

peace and my well-being I give to you.' Paul refers to this in Philippians 4:7 when he says that 'the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' His peace and well-being literally garrisons (as with a platoon of soldiers) the lives of faithful believers. His peace super-surpasses all understanding. Those who first have peace *with* god, and then the corollary peace *of* God girding their feet are powerful soldiers in the spiritual battle. No matter what the enemy throws at them, no matter what move the enemy makes, they hold their ground." R. Kent Hughes, p. 233.

Keys to Victory in the Battles:

**Depend on God's Strength*

**Wear His Armor*

Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
Boots	Gospel of Peace
Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	God's Word

**Pray*

Lesson 5

The War Shield of Faith

We all face the onslaught of negative thoughts as we fight for good in our lives and world. Fear, false guilt, a sense of hopelessness or proud self-sufficiency are among the paralyzing fiery darts with which the enemy seeks to bring us down. But it is impossible for these to penetrate the next piece of armor.

After instructing us to depend on God's strength and put on the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness and gospel of peace boots, Paul continues: "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16).

The Roman soldier's shield (*scutum*) was 4' X 2 1/2' (the size of a small door) and covered the whole person. It was made of wood encased in linen, then

leather to extinguish the flaming arrows used by the enemy in battle. The shield was bound in metal at the top and bottom, and could attach to the shields of other soldiers. Together, they could march forward on the battlefield like a long wall or huddle together under a huge turtle-like shell of protection.

The analogy declares that faith is the big shield for the Christian. When we take God at His word and trust His promises in a given situation, He becomes an impossible shield for the enemy to penetrate. Furthermore, when we attach our faith to that of other believers, we become an unstoppable force for building God's kingdom.

Even so, the enemy will continually use the circumstances of our lives and our vulnerable areas to send his flaming arrows of doubts, fear and temptation. He hopes we will forget the shield of faith and become self-dependent. This can allow him to regain control of our lives by blocking our growth in faith and leading us to be like we were without Christ.

His flaming arrows may come in the form of accusations that inflame us with false guilt³ or thoughts of unbelief, disobedience, rebellion, lust, hatred or fear. He seeks to bring down our standards and beliefs and make us want to run from the battle. Satan also tries to get us to see people as the enemy, rather than as those he has corrupted to do his destructive work, so we might waste time and energy on anger, ridicule and hatred.

But none of these flaming arrows can penetrate the shield of faith. We need not be conquered, rather we can square off with the enemy, as David did with Goliath. Faith in God's power in times of temptation and God's promises in times of doubt and discouragement can extinguish all the fiery darts of the enemy. This shield of faith also binds us together with other faithful believers for greater protection and strength as we march forward together to take enemy territory.

3. What is the enemy's goal in your life as he sends "fiery arrows" your way? (See commentary paragraph #4.)

4. The following are some common "fiery arrows" used by the enemy. What destructive things can happen if we do not quickly lift the shield of faith against these?

a. Temptations (to lie, hate, covet, follow lusts for things or sex):

b. During difficult times (illness, tragedies, persecution), thoughts of doubt about God's goodness, the truth of the gospel, or even God's existence:

c. Painful criticism, unfair treatment, rejection or hypocrisy from others that make us want to respond in kind:

d. Encouragement by our culture toward pride, vanity and self-centeredness:

e. False guilt; a constant or a vague sense of self-condemnation; a great sense of inadequacy and low self esteem:

5. What pieces of armor must already be in place when we take up the shield of faith. Briefly review and define these.

Ephesians 6:14-15

6. To hold up the shield of faith is *to trust God and His Word* related to the “fiery arrow” coming at us. When we do this, arrows that could easily ignite in us—temptations, deceptions, fears, bitterness—fall to the ground.

Summarize the promises or principles (of many that could be used) that could be used to thwart the enemy’s commonly used “fiery arrows.”

a. When we are tempted to lie, hate, covet, follow lusts for things or sex:
Psalm 119:1-2

1 Corinthians 10:13

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

b. During trials (illness, tragedies, persecution), thoughts of doubt about God's goodness, the truth of the gospel, or even God's existence:

Isaiah 41:10 (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Jeremiah 29:11-13

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:31-32

James 1:2-5

c. Painful criticism, rejection or hypocrisy from others:

Romans 12:14

Romans 12:17-18

Romans 12:21

Colossians 3:13

d. Encouragement by our culture toward pride, vanity and self-centeredness:

Luke 10:27-28

Philippians 2:3-5

James 4:6

1 Peter 5:6

e. False guilt; a constant barrage or vague sense of self-condemnation; thoughts of low self-esteem and inadequacy:

Romans 8:1

Important Reference: Note 3, *False Guilt*, p. 61.

Romans 8:38-39

2 Corinthians 3:5

Philippians 4:13

Reference: Note 2, *Other Promises to Trust*, p. 61.

7. Roman soldiers attached their shield to protect themselves or march forward as a unit. Hebrews 10:25 says, “Let us not give up meeting together.” Why is it important to link up with other faithful believers?

8. What do the following tell us about our shield of faith? Why is it impossible for the enemy to get to us when we raise this shield?

Psalm 7:10

Psalm 84:11

Psalm 91:4

NOTE: Earmark this lesson to encourage yourself and to help others experience the protection of the shield of faith in life's challenges.

S U M M A R Y

9. a. What is the goal of the enemy in your life?

b. What does it mean to raise the shield of faith against the enemy's assaults, and what is the result?

10. a. What are the situations and the "fiery arrows" that the enemy is currently using to attack you?

b. What commands or promises from this study help you raise the "shield of faith" against these assaults?

11. a. What is God's promise to you as you trust His Word and promises in the battles?

Isaiah 41:10

LESSON 5 NOTES

1 R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*, pp. 234-235.

2 Other Promises to Trust

When we feel anxious: Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6-7

When we feel inadequate: 2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:13

When we are weary or discouraged: Matthew 11:28-30

In times of failure: Psalm 37:24; Romans 8:28, 38-39

In times of temptation: 1 Corinthians 10:13

When we are afraid: Psalm 91:1-4; Isaiah 41:10; John 16:33

When we fear for our children: Proverbs 14:26

When we need strength: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Philippians 4:13

When we are unsure of the future: Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11

When we need courage: Joshua 1:9

When we need peace: John 14:27

3 *False guilt.* In her book, *Falling Apart or Coming Together*, Lois Walfrid Johnson contrasts the following differences between true and false guilt.*

See next page...

TRUE GUILT

FALSE GUILT

GUILT
PRODUCER

The **Holy Spirit**
convicts, based
on truth

Satan condemns,
based on lies

OBJECTIVE

Improvement

Defeat

SPOTLIGHT

Specific
unforgiven sin

Past failures and
forgiven sin; general
in nature

YOUR REACTION

Remorse and
repentance; asking
for forgiveness

Helplessness, a
no-win situation;
not knowing how
to make a change; no
peace if you ask for
forgiveness

GUILT
PRODUCER'S
ACTION

Grace; for-
givenness

Accusation

RESULT

Peace; feeling
set free, cleansed
and loved

No peace; defeat;
hopelessness;
despair; worth-
lessness. Feeling
emotionally,
spiritually and
physically tired

*Lois Walfrid Johnson, *Falling Apart or Coming Together* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 66.

Keys to Victory in the Battles:

**Depend on God's Strength*

**Wear His Armor*

Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
Boots	Gospel of Peace
Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	God's Word

**Pray*

Lesson 6

The Helmet of Salvation

Throughout our study, we have been reminded that we must depend on God's strength, not our own, in the battles for good we face. The enemy is far too powerful, cruel and cunning for us to face alone, but he is no match for the one who stands beside us. As we wear the spiritual armor that brings God to our side, we can stand our ground and take ground from the enemy on the field of battle.

The pieces of this armor we have examined thus far are:

(1) **the belt of truth** -- believing the truth of God's Word and living truthfully,

(2) **the breastplate of righteousness** -- clothing ourselves with the imputed righteousness of Christ and seeking to live as He lived,

(3) **the gospel of peace boots** -- enjoying peace *with* God and the peace *of* God through faith in Christ, and seeking to share the gospel of peace with others, and

(4) **the shield of faith** -- holding up the promises of God's Word whenever Satan's fiery arrows threaten to pull us away from God and His purposes.

Paul now adds the mind-shield as he writes, "Take the helmet of salvation" The Roman soldier's helmet was made of metal that only a hammer or ax could pierce and had felt or sponge inside for comfort. It had a band to protect the forehead, plates for the cheeks, and extended down in the back to protect the neck. Only the eyes, nose and mouth were exposed. Some helmets had a hinged visor that gave protection in front, and some had decorative plumes or crests. It was the helmet that protected the soldier's head, and most importantly his mind, the control center of his body and life.

The analogy points to the fact that the helmet that protects our minds on the battlefield is our assurance of God's salvation.

Salvation is the basic theme of the Scriptures and refers to the ways God rescues, delivers and redeems those who trust in Him. The helmet of salvation is the assurance of God's redeeming love at work in every difficulty and challenge we face. More than this, it is the assurance and confidence that comes from having received God's gift of eternal salvation through faith in Christ. This salvation is by God's grace, not our wavering performance. Even death, the trump card in the enemy's hand, cannot defeat us.

One author writes that the helmet is "placed on our head by the nail-pierced hands of Christ at our conversion."¹ No matter what happens, we know that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). It is a certainty that in the end we will be with Christ and be like Christ in heaven. With this helmet of salvation protecting our minds, we are able to bring that salvation to others.

The helmet of salvation, then, is God's protection from the power of sin in this life and complete deliverance from sin in the next.

In this lesson on *Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World*, we will look at the necessary helmet of salvation that protects our minds and gives us confidence, whatever the circumstance, in the conflict.

1. a. Why do our minds need protection as we face the various battles of life? To what destructive emotions are we vulnerable?

b. How did the Roman soldier's helmet protect him?

c. What does this suggest about the "helmet of salvation" we are to wear in the battles we face?

2. a. Throughout Scripture, God reveals Himself as a loving Savior. What is important to know and remember about God when we face life's uncertainties and difficulties?

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:32

b. What does God promise in any battle we face?

Isaiah 41:13

Zephaniah 3:17

c. What can we declare?

Psalms 27:1

3. What does Scripture also say we must continually choose to allow God to guard our minds?

Philippians 4:6-7

Philippians 4:8

2 Corinthians 10:5

4. a. Death is Satan's greatest weapon, and because of our sin, it strikes every human being. What does God promise those who have placed their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ?

Romans 6:23

Ephesians 2:8-9

b. What did Jesus promise us about eternal life?

John 5:24

John 11:25-26

John 14:1-3

c. With the Psalmist, what can the believer confidently declare?

Psalm 23:4, 6

5. What does the believer have to look forward to in death?

Luke 23:43

Philippians 3:20-21 (1 Corinthians 15:42-44a, 54)

1 John 3:2b

6. a. Revelation 21-22 records John's vision of the new heaven and earth where believers will live forever. What do the following verses promise?

Revelation 21:1, 3-5

b. While we see all these things dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12), of what are we assured in 1 Corinthians 2:9?

7. What is the assurance God wants us to have through His Word?

1 John 5:13

S U M M A R Y

8. The "helmet of salvation" is the protection of our minds that comes from God's promises to redeem and save us from any situation on the battlefield of life. Assurance that we will live forever in heaven liberates our minds from fear of the future.

a. What issues are you facing in your life right now that can lead you toward negative, destructive thinking?

b. What does God promise you that can give you peace with these issues?

9. What biblical promises about death and eternal life give you confidence as a believer and protect your mind like a helmet in the battles for good?

10. This salvation is a gift of God, not based on our performance (Ephesians 2:8-9). Why does this give us security and confidence?

Note: If you have never received the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, perhaps you would like to do this now. The **Final Note** on page 13 may be helpful to you.

LESSON 6 NOTES

1 Kent Hughes, p. 241

Keys to Victory in the Battles:

**Depend on God's Strength*

**Wear His Armor*

Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
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Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	God's Word

**Pray*

Lesson 7

The Spirit's Sword: God's Word

The Roman soldier's two-edged short sword, *machaira*, was used in hand-to-hand combat both defensively and offensively—both to defend against and to take ground from the enemy. This is the sword that Paul referred to as he instructed us to, "Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17b). *What God has said* is the weapon *par excellence* given to us by the Holy Spirit to defend our ground and to take ground from the enemy in spiritual warfare.

Jesus demonstrated the use of the "sword of the Spirit" when He quoted Scripture to defeat Satan's onslaughts in His wilderness temptations (Matthew 4). If the Son of God used this defense, it makes sense that we should do nothing less. As we fill our heart with God's Word, sin, temptation, doubt and defeat cannot control us.

Furthermore, the Word of God is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to break the bondage of sin in people's lives. Satan knows this and would like believers to keep the Scriptures to themselves, intimidated by persecution or societal claims that the Bible is outdated, inaccurate and irrelevant. One author comes against this enemy tactic as he strongly exhorts believers to:

Face the truth—we are at war, and our razor-sharp weapon is God's Word, and we are fools to keep it in the scabbard simply because our culture says it cannot cut. That is what the enemy wants us to believe, that it is "irrelevant" and "archaic" and "not understandable," so keep it in the sheath, where it is, of course, harmless. How much better it is to obey God who commands us to "Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."¹

Hebrews 4:12 declares, "the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Only the Bible, not image, personality or clever schemes, leads people to salvation and a personal relationship with God through Christ. God's Word lays people's lives open, convicts their consciences, and brings healing and redemption through its truth.

To win the battles for good in our world, then, we have to take up the Spirit's sword, God's Word. This means to read it, meditate on it, memorize it, study it, share it, quote it and love it. As we do this, we will be equipped to protect ourselves from the treacherous personal assaults of the enemy that come with the battles of life. We will also be prepared to be used by the Spirit to bring God's revelation and healing to the lives of others. In this lesson, we will look at this very powerful weapon God has given us—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

1. Paul introduces the last piece of the armor of God with, "Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17b).

a. Describe the Roman sword to which Paul refers. (See commentary paragraph 1.)

b. What is our "sword" in the battle for good?

c. What does this word picture illustrate about our weapon in spiritual warfare -- "what God has said"?

2. a. Apart from God and His Word, what "weapons" do people tend to trust in the battles of life?

b. What is the result? Why are these sources of protection ultimately inadequate?

3. How does Psalm 19:7-11 describe the Word of God and the results of dependence upon this weapon? (Answer (a) and (b) simultaneously).

We will do this one for you!

a. What adjectives describe God's Word (or laws)?

GOD'S WORD IS: PERFECT, SURE, RIGHT, PURE, CLEAN, TRUE, DESIREABLE, SWEET...

b. What phrases describe the benefits of embracing God's Word?

IT: RESTORES THE SOUL, MAKES WISE THE SIMPLE, REJOICES THE HEART, ENLIGHTENS THE EYES, ENDURES FOREVER, AND WARNS OF DANGER. IN KEEPING IT THERE IS GREAT REWARD...

4. What do the following passages declare about the Word of God (*logos*)?
Psalm 33:6, 8-9

Psalm 119:89

5. a. According to Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:18-23 (cf. 13:3-8), what can keep God's Word from taking root in our lives?

b. What must we determine to do with God's Word for it to take root in our lives and become the sword of the Spirit for us in spiritual warfare?
Matthew 13:23

6. a. In the wilderness, Jesus resisted Satan's temptations in the areas of fleshly appetites (Matthew 4:3), showing off His power before people, or pride (4:5-6), and material and political gain (4:8-9). What is common to all of Jesus' responses? Matthew 4:4, 7, 10

b. What was the result? Matthew 4:11

7. "Taking up" the Word of God (the Spirit's sword) allows us to defend ourselves against enemy onslaughts with conviction and power as Jesus did.

a. How does John describe this key to victory over evil in 1 John 2:14b?

b. When we resist thoughts from the enemy with truth from God's Word, what will happen?
James 4:7b

c. What aspects of "taking up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God" are found in the following verses?

Deuteronomy 6:6-8

Psalm 119:97

8. a. How must we view the Scriptures for them to be our sword in spiritual warfare?

Deuteronomy 32:47a (46)

2 Peter 1:21 (1 Thessalonians 2:13b)

Reference: Note 2, *carried along by the Holy Spirit*, p. 79.

b. What must we seek to do in order to use the sword of the Spirit with power?

Psalm 119:36-37

2 Timothy 2:15

9. a. We take ground from the enemy when we promote the good that God desires in our lives and the lives of others. Why is God's Word able to do this like nothing else can?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Reference: Note 3, *God-breathed*, p. 79.

Hebrews 4:12

b. Why should we seek to provide Scriptures for people we want to know Christ's love?

10. What benefits will we experience as we take up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, amidst the battles for good we face?

Psalms 1:1-3

Psalm 119:32

Psalm 119:165

S U M M A R Y

11. Why is it crucial that you develop and maintain your knowledge of God's Word?

12. In the battles for good in your life and world that most concern you today, what does it mean to "take . . . the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God"?

13. Why is Scripture able to work supernaturally in your life and the lives of those you touch?

14. What is the result of making God's Word the central focus of our lives and giving His Word to others?

LESSON 7 NOTES

1 Kent Hughes, p. 244.

2 *carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:1). "In the production of Scripture both God and man were active participants. God was the source of the content of Scripture, so that what it says is what God has said. But the human author also actively spoke; he was more than a recorder. Yet what he said came from God. Although actively speaking, he was carried along by the Holy Spirit." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1900.

3 *God-breathed* (2 Timothy 3:16). "The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed His person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down His message for His people (2 Peter 1:20-21). This process is known as *inspiration*. The writers wrote from their own personal, historical, and cultural contexts. Although they used their own minds, talents, language, and style, they wrote what God wanted them to write. Scripture is completely trustworthy because God was in control of its writing. Its words are entirely authoritative for our faith and lives. The Bible is 'God-breathed.' Read it, and use its teachings to guide your conduct." *Life Application Bible*, NIV, p. 2203.

Keys to Victory in the Battles:

**Depend on God's Strength*

**Wear His Armor*

Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
Boots	Gospel of Peace
Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	God's Word

****Pray***

Lesson 8

The Secret Weapon of Prayer

Prayer is the weapon with no earthly equivalent.¹ While God's Word holds the power to change lives, prayer unites us with God and brings His power to the situation. Simply defined as "talking with God," prayer is our secret weapon of victory against the forces of evil.

Paul begins this passage by emphasizing the importance of dependence on God's strength, not our own, in the battles against Satan's forces of evil. "Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10), Paul declares. He returns to this emphasis as he concludes: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18). Paul leaves us with this final thought on prayer, our vital communication with central

command. Without this, we can be wearing all of our spiritual armor and still lose the battle. Kent Hughes writes:

"Those who would engage in spiritual warfare, regardless of how well they wear truth and righteousness and faith and salvation, regardless of how well they are grounded in peace, regardless of how well they wield the Word, must make prayer the first thing. The Christian soldier fights on his knees! Prayer is the supreme weapon to us "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms" (v. 12).²

Furthermore, prayer that brings victory in the battles is prayer "in the Spirit." This is prayer prompted and inspired by the Holy Spirit as we make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit³ to live in our hearts and unite us with Him (John 14:16-17). As we allow the Holy Spirit to fill, or control and empower our lives, (Ephesians 5:18b), He leads us in prayer in accordance with God's will in each situation.

Far from being restricted and standardized, the Spirit gives us limitless freedom and variety as we talk to God "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." This includes regular prayer times and constant "anytime" prayer, private prayer and corporate prayer, silent and audible prayer. We can talk to God at any time with our eyes open or closed, and in any position---standing, sitting, kneeling or horizontal. Our prayers may be in the form of praise, thanksgiving, requests, intercession for others, or silence in God's presence. Prayer in the Spirit is limitless and freeing, healing and calming, as He helps us talk to God about everything (Philippians 4:6; Proverbs 3:6).

Then Paul adds, "With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." The Spirit makes us watchful and persevering in prayer. Like good soldiers, we are constrained by the Spirit not to go to sleep or quit, although to be sure the enemy will do anything to keep us from praying.

Rather, we will continually be alert to prayer needs, and we will not stop praying until the Spirit leads us to stop, or we receive the Lord's answer.

Finally, the Holy Spirit enables us to see that the cosmic battle between Satan's forces for evil and the Lord's forces for good includes every believer in the world. We march forward together, and where one falls in the line, we all suffer. For this reason, we are called to be "always praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18b). Praying for Christians in other parts of the world keeps us from solely focusing on our own struggles and concerns as we send out grace to other believers throughout the world that are "undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:9). The more we have this perspective, the stronger we become as we realize that the overall battle against evil is the Lord's battle, and we and all believers are on the winning side with Him. Nothing can defeat the cause we stand for, because it is His cause.

In war, it is essential to stay connected with central command. We must do this as we let the Spirit lead us in prevailing prayer. We will conclude our study on *Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World* with a look at this powerful secret weapon.

1. What do we need to know about the Lord who listens to our prayers?
Psalm 121:3

Psalm 139:1-3

Psalm 145:8

Isaiah 58:9

2. a. Ephesians 6:18 tells us to pray “on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” What does this tell us about how often and in what way God wants us to come to Him in prayer?

b. What do the following verses add to this?

1 Chronicles 16:11

Psalm 62:8

Philippians 4:6

3. Prayer has been simply defined as "talking to God." The 17th century Archbishop Francois Fenelon described the freedom and intimacy of prayer when he wrote:

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him about your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.

What do you observe from this writing about the simplicity and freedom of prayer?

4. Ephesians 6:18 suggests that the secret of intimacy and effectiveness in prayer is praying "in the Spirit." This is prayer offered from a heart committed to God's will and filled, or yielded to, the Holy Spirit's control.³ In John 15, Jesus speaks of this as "abiding" in Him, or "remaining" in Him, as a branch must stay connected to the vine for life.

To pray in the Spirit means to be in union with Christ and allow the Spirit to lead us in prayer. How does the Holy Spirit help us in prayer according to Romans 8:26-27?

Note: For more information on the Holy Spirit, see Note 3, *Knowing the Holy Spirit*, p. 91, and Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 26.

5. a. Our Commander in the battle is also praying for us. What does Romans 8:34 declare?

b. During His life on earth, how did Jesus demonstrate the importance of prayer?

Luke 5:16 (Luke 6:12)

c. What does this tell us about our need to pray?

6. Ephesians 6:18 tells us to “be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” What instructions regarding watchfulness and perseverance in prayer for others are found in the following verses?

Matthew 26:41

Luke 18:1

1 Timothy 2:1-2

James 5:17

7. When we talk to the Lord, our Commander, about everything, what do these passages promise?

Matthew 11:28

2 Chronicles 7:14

Proverbs 3:6

8. As we depend on the Lord's strength, continually taking our needs to Him in prayer and wearing His armor in the battles for good that we face, what can we declare?

Psalm 44:5

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Romans 8:31b, 37

S U M M A R Y

9. Why is prayer the basis for winning the battles for good you are concerned about in your life and world?

10. Why is allowing the Spirit to lead you in prayer the key to effectiveness and fulfillment in your prayer life?

Reference: Note 3, *Knowing the Holy Spirit*, p. 91.

11. Having a regular time of prayer and meditation each day brings peace to our lives and God's strength to the battles we face. For this reason, Satan will do anything to keep you from it. The following may be helpful in offsetting common obstacles to having a regular quiet time.

- Schedule a quiet time in your daily routine. Have a starting time and an ending time.
- Have a general format to follow such as:
 - Settling down time:** Take a moment to clear the mind of distractions and settle into quietness with God.
 - Listening time:** Read the Bible, do a portion of your Bible study lesson, or read a daily devotional book with the purpose of listening to God's wisdom regarding your life.
 - Prayer time:** Talk with God about issues in your life. It is often helpful to keep a journal of praise, thanksgiving and specific requests.
- Choosing an uncluttered place and using the same place every day may be helpful.
- Have a note pad to one side to jot down distracting thoughts that need attention or future action.

What is a realistic plan for you?

12. Ephesians 6:18 emphasizes “anytime” prayer. It commands us to pray "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Why is "anytime" prayer so crucial in the battles for good we face?

WINNING THE BATTLES RECAP

13. In our study from Ephesians 6 on *Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World*, what have you learned about:

Our real enemy?

Dependence on God in the battles?

14. How would you define the armor that brings God to our side in the battles?:

The belt of **truth**:

The breastplate of **righteousness**:

The **gospel of peace** boots:

The helmet of **salvation**:

The shield of **faith**:

The sword of the Spirit, the **Word of God**:

15. Why must prayer pervade our lives in order to win the battles for good?

16. What battles for good are you most concerned about today...

in your life?

in our world?

17. As you face these battles, of what can you be sure as you draw on God's power and put on the armor of God each day?

LESSON 8 NOTES

1 Stuart Olyott, *Alive in Christ*, p. 139.

2 Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, pp. 251-252.

3 *Knowing the Holy Spirit*. Because the Holy Spirit is the source of power in the Christian's life, it is important to know who He is. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is revealed along with the Father and the Son as a full and distinct person of the Godhead. As a divine Person, the Holy Spirit is eternal, everywhere present, almighty, perfectly wise, perfectly just and perfectly good (Hebrews 9:14, Psalm 139:7-10, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11). The Holy Spirit's distinct role is the Sanctifier who frees us to lead new lives in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to spiritual rebirth, brings Christ's presence to us, keeps us in touch with God, makes us realize God's love, gives us power to witness and to live the Christian life, and gives us spiritual gifts with which to serve the body of Christ (Titus 3:5, John 14:16-18, Romans 8:26, Romans 5:5, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:5-9, 1 Corinthians 2:4-12). He teaches, encourages, comforts, pleads for us and leads us into all truth (John 16:13, Acts 9:31, John 14:16, Romans 8:27). See also Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 26, and *Final Note: prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit*, p. 13. The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of each believer (Romans 8:9; John 14:16-17). However, we choose to let Him fill, or control and empower our lives as we are commanded to do in Ephesians 5:18. We can choose to obey this command if we confess all known sin in our lives (1 John 1:9) and ask God to

take control of our lives, or fill us with His Spirit (Luke 11:13; see prayer, p. 13). When we disobey God, we grieve the Spirit as we take back the control of our lives from Him. We can let the Spirit take control again if we confess our sin and ask God to take control of our lives again.

Major Footnotes Directory

Lesson	Page	Note & Topic
1	14	1 Jesus Christ's recorded dealings with demonic forces. 2 Jesus Christ's teachings and references to the devil. 3 Satan.
	15	4 Satan's character and schemes.
	16	5 <i>Be strong</i> (6:10).
2	26	3 Holy Spirit.
3	37	1 "Why did Christ have to die in my place?" a. Justification. b. Redemption. c. Propitiation. d. Reconciliation.
4	49	4 The peace of God, Philippians 4:7.
5	61	2 Other Promises to Trust.
	62	3 False guilt/True guilt.
7	79	2 <i>carried along by the Holy Spirit</i> (2 Peter 1:1). 3 <i>God-breathed</i> (2 Timothy 3:16).
8	91	3 Knowing the Holy Spirit.

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Appendix

Know Why You Believe by Paul Little

Why Does God Allow Suffering and Evil?

Why God allows suffering and evil in our world is one of the most pressing questions of our time. More pressing than the question of miracles or the question concerning science and the Bible is the poignant problem of why seemingly innocent people suffer, why babies are born blind, or why a promising life is snuffed out when it is on the rise. Why are there wars in which thousands of civilians are killed, children are burned beyond recognition, and many are maimed for life?

Seemingly the answer to this question pinpoints two sides of the dilemma for Christians:

- God is *all-powerful* but *not* all-good, and therefore He doesn't want to stop evil.
- God is *all-good* but *unable* to stop evil, and therefore He is not all-powerful.

By responding to this question either way, the general tendency is to blame God for suffering and evil and thus pass all responsibility for them to Him.

No Easy Answers

This profound question is not one that can be treated lightly or in a dogmatic fashion. Let's go back and recall what happened when God created Adam and Eve; He created them perfect. They were not created evil. As human beings, however, Adam and Eve did have the ability to obey or disobey God. Had they obeyed God, there would never have been a problem. They would have lived an unending life of blissful fellowship with God and enjoyment of Him and His creation. This is what God had intended for them when He created

them. In fact, however, they rebelled against God when they ate the forbidden fruit.

From that time on, every one of us has ratified that rebellion and taken the same route. "Therefore," declared the Apostle Paul, "just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). It is people who are responsible for sin—not God.

But many ask, "Why didn't God make us so we couldn't sin?" To be sure, God could have. But let's remember that if He had done so we would no longer be human beings; we would be machines, mere puppets on a string. How would you like to be married to a mechanical doll? Every morning and every night you could pull the string and get the beautiful words, "I love you." But who would want that? There really would never be any love because true love is voluntary. Our choices are voluntary. God could have made us like robots, but we would have ceased to be human. Would you like to be a robot? Few of us would honestly answer yes. God apparently thought it worth the risk of creating us as we are and this is the reality we face.

God Could Have Stamped Out Evil!

Jeremiah reminds us, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail" (Lam. 3:22). A time is coming when God *will* stamp out evil in the world. The Devil and all his works will come under eternal judgment. In the meantime, God's unchanging love and grace prevail, and His marvelous offer of mercy and pardon is still open to everyone.

If God were to stamp out evil today, He would do a complete job. We want Him to stop war but stay remote from us. If God were to remove evil from the universe, His action would be complete and would have to include our lies and personal impurities, our lack of love and our failure to do good. Suppose

God were to decree that tonight all evil would be removed from the universe—who of us would still be here after midnight?

The Bible tells us the sobering truth by explaining: Sin has been passed on to all humankind through Adam and Eve's choice, and each of us has chosen to follow. From birth we begin by asserting, "No." The sin of Adam and Eve separated them from the close relationship they had with God, and it does likewise for us. The perfect holiness of God can allow no less than separation. It is the consequence of our choices.

God's Ultimate Solution

In this dismal situation, the loving God has done the most dramatic, costly, and effective thing possible by sending His Son to die on our behalf. It is possible for people to escape God's inevitable judgment on sin and evil. It's also possible to have its power broken by entering into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The ultimate answer to the problem of evil, at the personal level, is found in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

To speculate about the origin of evil is endless. No one has the full answer. It belongs in the category of "the secret things [that] belong to the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:29).

Hugh Evan Hopkins observes:

The problem (of evil) arises largely from the belief that a good God would reward each man according to his deeds and that an almighty God would have no difficulty in carrying this out. The fact that rewards and punishments, in the way of happiness and discomfort, appear to be haphazardly distributed in this life drives many to question either the goodness of God or his power.¹

But would God be good if He were to deal with each person exactly according to his or her behavior? Consider what this would mean in your own life! The whole of the Gospel as previewed in the Old Testament and broadcast in stereo in the New Testament is that God's goodness consists not only in His justice but also in His love, mercy, and kindness. How thankful everyone should be that "he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him" (Ps. 103:10-11).

Such a concept of the goodness of God is also based on the faulty assumption that happiness is the greatest good in life. Happiness is usually thought of in terms of comfort. True, genuine, deep-seated happiness, however, is something much more profound than the ephemeral, fleeting enjoyment of the moment. And true happiness is not precluded by suffering. Sometimes, in His infinite wisdom, God knows that there are things to be accomplished in our character that can be brought about only through suffering. To shield us from this suffering would be to rob us of a greater good. "One reason sin flourishes is that it is treated like a cream puff instead of a rattlesnake."²

Exact Reward Concept

The Apostle Peter referred to this issue of suffering as a believer when he said, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Peter 5:10).

To see the logical consequence of the exact reward concept, coined by John Stuart Mill, we need only turn to Hinduism. The law of karma says that what is experienced today is the result of the actions of a previous life. Blindness, poverty, hunger, physical deformity, isolation, and other social agonies are all the outworking of punishment for evil deeds carried out in a previous existence.

It would follow that any attempt to alleviate such pain and misery would be an interference with the law of karma. This concept is one reason why the Hindus did so little for so long for their unfortunates. Some enlightened Hindus today are talking about and working toward social progress and change, but they have not yet reconciled this new concept with the ancient doctrine of karma, which is basic to Hindu thought and life.

This concept of karma, however, does serve as a neat, simple, clearly understood explanation of suffering: All suffering is the result of previous evil-doing. Dr. Douglas Groothuis asks a penetrating question: If a child dying of leukemia is suffering because she slaughtered innocent people in a former life, she would neither be aware of her previous transgression nor could she learn from it in her present condition.

But does Christianity also hold that suffering is punishment from God? In the minds of many, it certainly does. "What did I do to deserve this?" is often the first question on the lips of a sufferer. And the conviction of friends, expressed or unexpressed, frequently operates on this same assumption. Indeed, it compounded his already staggering pain.

It is clear from the teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments that suffering may be the judgment of God, but that there are many instances when it is totally unrelated to personal wrongdoing. Therefore, an automatic assumption of guilt and consequent punishment is totally unwarranted.

God is not a sentimental grandfather in the sky with a boys-will-be-boys attitude. "A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7) is a solemn warning to any who would tweak God's nose in arrogant presumption.

That there may be a connection between suffering and sin is evident, but that it is not always so is abundantly clear. We have the unambiguous word of Jesus Himself on the subject. The disciples apparently adhered to the direct retribution theory of suffering. One day when they saw a man who had been

blind from birth, they wanted to know who had sinned to cause his blindness—the man or his parents. Jesus made it clear that neither was responsible for his condition, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (Luke 13:3).

Clearly, then, we are jumping the gun if we automatically assume, either in our own case or in that of another, that the explanation for any given tragedy or suffering is the judgment of God. Furthermore, as Hopkins observe, it seems clear from biblical examples that if one's troubles are the just rewards of misdeeds, the sufferer is never left in any doubt when his or her trouble is a punishment.

Judgment Preceded by Warning

One of the profound truths of the whole of Scripture is that God's warning preceded His judgment. Throughout the Old Testament, we have the repeated pleadings of God and warning of judgment. Only after warning is persistently ignored and rejected does judgment come. God's poignant words from the mouth of His prophet Ezekiel are an example: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11)

The same theme continues in the New Testament. What more moving picture of God's love and long-suffering is there than when Jesus wept over Jerusalem: "I have longed to gather your children together," He said, "as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matt. 23:37). And we have the clear word of Peter that God does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

When someone asks, "How could a good God send people to hell?" we should point out that, in a sense, God sends no one to hell. We send ourselves. God has done all that is necessary for us to be forgiven, redeemed, cleansed, and made fit for heaven. All that remains is for us to receive this gift. If we refuse

it, God has no option but to give us our choice. Heaven, for the person who does not want to be there, would be hell.

Though the judgment of God sometimes explains suffering, there are several other possibilities to consider. People, as we saw earlier, were responsible for the coming of sin and death into the world. We must not forget that humankind's wrongdoing is also responsible for a great deal of misery and suffering in the world today. Negligence in the construction of a building has sometimes resulted in its collapse in a storm with consequent death and injury. How many lives have been snuffed out as a result of drunken driving? The cheating, lying, stealing, and selfishness that are characteristic of our society today all reap a bitter harvest of suffering. But we can hardly blame God for it! Think of all the misery that has its origin in the wrongdoing of human beings; it is remarkable how much suffering is accounted for in this way.

Does the Devil Exist?

But we are not alone on this planet. By divine revelation we know of the presence of an "enemy," the Devil. We are told that he appears in various forms which he deems appropriate to each occasion. He may appear as an angel of light or as a roaring lion, depending on the circumstances and his purposes. His name is Satan. It was he whom God allowed to cause Job to suffer (Job 1:6-12). In the Parable of the Tares, Jesus described the destruction of a farmer's harvest by saying, "An enemy did this" (Matt. 13:28).

Satan finds great pleasure in ruining God's creation and causing misery and suffering among people. God allows him limited power, but through the power of Jesus Christ, we have authority over Satan's power. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), we are assured. Nevertheless, Satan accounts for some of the disease and suffering in the world today.

In answer to the question of why God allows Satan's power to bring suffering, we can learn from Daniel Defoe's eighteenth-century classic, *Robinson Crusoe*, in which the following dialogue takes place:

"Well," says Friday, "you say God is so strong, so great; has he not as much strong, as much might as the devil?"

"Yes, yes," says I; "Friday, God is much stronger than the devil."

"But if God much strong, much might as the devil why God no kill the devil so make him no more do wicked?"

"You may as well ask," answers Crusoe reflectively, "why does God not kill you and me when we do wicked things that offend him?"

God Feels Our Suffering

In considering pain and suffering, whether physical or mental, another important consideration must be kept in mind. God is not a distant, aloof, impervious potentate, far removed from His people and their sufferings. He not only is aware of human suffering—He feels it.

No pain or suffering has ever come to us that has not first passed through the heart and hand of God. However greatly we may suffer, it is well to remember that God is the great sufferer. Comforting are the words of Isaiah the prophet, foretelling the agony of Jesus Christ: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering" (Isa. 53:3). Another writer reminds us, "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). And "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (4:15).

The problem of evil and suffering has persisted through the ages. With our increased technological know-how, the possibilities for tyranny and inhumanity of every kind have multiplied. There are no easy answers, and we do not have the last word. There are, however, clues.

The Risky Gift of Free Will

- First, evil is a necessary part of free will. J. B. Phillips provides these insights:

Evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will. God could have made us machines but to do so would have robbed us of our precious freedom of choice, and we would have ceased to be human. Exercise of free choice in the direction of evil in what we call the "fall" of man [Adam's sin in the garden of Eden] is the basic reason for evil and suffering in the world. It is man's responsibility, not God's. He could stop it, but in so doing would destroy us all. It is worth nothing that the whole point of real Christianity lies not in interference with the human power to choose, but in producing a *willing consent* to choose good rather than evil.³

Unless the universe is without significance, the actions of every individual affect others. No one is an island. To have it otherwise would be like playing a game of chess and changing the rules after every move. Life would be meaningless.

- Second, much of the suffering in the world can be traced directly to the evil choices men and women make. This is quite apparent when a bank robber kills someone. Sometimes it is less apparent and more indirect as when crooked decisions are made in government or business that may bring deprivation and suffering to many people unknown to those who make the decisions. Even the results of natural disasters are sometimes compounded by people's culpability in refusing to heed warnings of their coming.
- Third, some but not all suffering is allowed by God as judgment and punishment. This is a possibility that must always be considered. God usually allows such suffering with a view to restoration of a person or a people and character formation, and those who suffer as a result of their misdeeds usually know it (Heb. 12:7-8, 11).

- Fourth, God has a vengeful and implacable enemy in Satan, who was defeated at the cross but is free to work his evil deeds until the final judgment. That there is in the world a force of evil stronger than human beings is clear from revelation and from experience.
- Fifth, God Himself is the great sufferer and has fully met the problem of evil in the gift of His own Son at infinite cost and suffering to Himself. The consequence of evil for eternity is forever removed as we embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Our sin is forgiven and we receive new life and power to choose what is God's best way for us. He directs us and strengthens us and forms us to be more like Jesus Christ in our character.

Greatest Test of Faith

Perhaps the greatest test of faith for the Christian today is to believe that God is good. There is much in our lives and culture that, taken in isolation, suggests the contrary. Theologian Helmut Thielecke points out that a fabric viewed through a magnifying glass is clear in the middle and blurred at the edges. Because of what we see in the middle, we know for certain the edges are clear. Life, he says, is like viewing a fabric.

Around the many edges of our lives, much is blurred, for we do not understand many of its events and circumstances. But they can be interpreted rightly by the clarity we see in the center – the cross of Christ. We are not left to guess about the goodness of God from isolated bits of data. He has clearly revealed His character and dramatically demonstrated it to us in the cross. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

God never asks us to understand, but just to trust Him in the same way we ask our child to trust our love and care when we take him or her to a doctor. Peace comes when we recognize in this life we do not have the full picture. Yet we do have enough to show us that the edges will be great.

We can affirm, with calm relief and joy, "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (v. 28).

At times it is our reaction to suffering, rather than the suffering itself, that determines whether the experience is one of blessing or of blight. The same sun melts the butter and hardens the clay.

When by God's grace we can view all of life through the lens of faith in God's love, we can affirm with Habakkuk: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Hab. 3:17-18).

1 Hugh Evan Hopkins, "Mystery of Suffering" (Downers Grove, Il., InterVarsity Press, 1959) in J.S. Mill, *Nature and Utility of Religion: Two Essays*, ed. George Nakhnikian (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs, 1958), p. 38.

2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 J. B. Phillips, *God Our Contemporary* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 88-89.

Winning the Battles for Good in a Troubled World

Studies on the Armor of God from Ephesians 6

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