

BE STRONG IN THE LORD, STAND!

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Wherefore take up the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6.10-13 ASV)

Whether believers know it or not, they are in the midst of a mighty battle. The stakes are very high. Who will conquer through the life of Christ and enter the reign of the heavens in the next eon when Christ sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth? Who will be found worthy to rise in the first resurrection or, as Paul called it, the *out*-resurrection from among the dead? How are we to fight this battle to win? Paul, the dear beloved apostle who was poured out as a drink offering, fought the good fight, and he was faithful to leave us instruction on the way to engage in this battle in a fashion that will lead to victory, to be conquerors through Him who loves us.

So great a salvation is contested.

We are living in evil days. From the very beginning of mankind, there has been a battle raging over who will ultimately reign over this earth. This battle has continued throughout the 6,000 years of Man's day. Man was created to have dominion, but Adam did not bring his progeny into the fullness of this dominion as Elohim purposed for mankind. He experienced this dominion in great measure for about the first 33 years of his life from his creation from the soil of the earth. However, after his fall, Adam's dominion, and consequently mankind's dominion, was tainted and the world came under the sway of the evil one and the dark forces among the celestials (1 John 5.19).

Thank God; 2,000 years ago, God sent His Son to this earth to take on the form of man, die for the sin of the world, and bring forth the one new man in Christ. He is the last Adam, the Second Man. He defeated the works of the evil one and won the right for the one new man to ascend the throne to reign over this earth when the time comes as fixed by the Father (Acts 1.7). Now, set before every believer is so great a salvation (Hebrews 2.3). This is not a reference to our salvation that we possess when we first believe. So great a salvation refers to entering the reign of the heavens with Christ in the oncoming eon, or what is called the Kingdom Age or the Tabernacles Age. It is about being glorified as Christ is glorified, and being offered the reward of positions of being priests of God and of Christ to reign with Christ for 1,000 years (Matthew 25.21; Luke 19.17, 19; 1 Corinthians 6.2-3; Revelation 5.10; 20.4-6). To receive the reward of the inheritance, we are to be

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faithful to our Master while He is gone to receive a kingdom (Matthew 25.14-30; Luke 19.12-26) and to bear fruit with a view to the kingdom (Matthew 21.43). It is about having faith to the (salvation) preserving of the soul (Hebrews 10.39) and not shrinking back to destruction. It is about being a doer of the word, being justified by works done through faith (James 1.22, 25; 2.14-26).

Set before every child of God is the most tremendous goal. We are exhorted to be partakers of the heavenly calling.

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away {from it.} For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Hebrews 2.1-3 NASB)

Have you heard the word of the kingdom, which speaks of the reign of the heavens coming to this earth; that is, the rule of God established on earth to lead the nations? Have you paid much closer attention to this word? If we do not pay attention, we might drift away from this word and be disqualified from attaining unto the eon (age) to come, the world to come (Hebrews 2.5), that is reserved for all who are worthy of the first resurrection.

There is so much more to so great a salvation, but we need to see that entering into it is hotly contested by an enemy who does not want believers to lay hold of it. All who believe and trust in the Lord are in a spiritual battle, whether they know it or not, or whether they have taken it up or not. A battle is being waged to disqualify the Lord's people from taking the reign over this earth in the Lord's day. It is a battle over who will reign over this earth with Christ. Not neglecting so great a salvation requires, even demands, that we enter into the conflict of the eon (age) and fight the good fight according to God's way given to us in His word. If we do not take up the battle in the right way, then we are in defeat. But there is a way to engage in this battle and to win it. As Paul, near the end of his life, wrote to Timothy:

Suffer hardship with {me,} as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Timothy 2.3-4 NASB)

In other words, saints are to be soldiers, and every good soldier must battle in the proper fashion.

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The mystery of Christ in the Ephesians epistle.

It is in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians that we are instructed in how to wage the battle as a soldier of Christ.

Paul spent three years with the saints in Ephesus, pouring his heart out to them to reveal the mystery or secret of Christ. Later, he wrote them a letter to unveil the fullness of Christ and the believer's position in Christ as part of the one new man.

The mystery of Christ as revealed by Paul is that the nations have become fellow heirs, along with believing, natural Jews, in one body, with the potential of ascending the throne with Christ when He ascends His throne to rule over this earth during the millennial kingdom. This is a tremendous revelation. Before the foundation of the world, God chose a people to become a new creation that is destined for the throne of God (Ephesians 1.3-6). God broke down the dividing wall between natural Israel and the nations and birthed a new man, one new man in Christ. He made one new man from the two; and today in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile but one new man (Ephesians 2.14-18), to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Knowing that there would be much challenge to this word, Paul reminded the saints that the Lord gave some as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers to lead the body of Christ from immaturity to maturity in *the* faith so that its many members would no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting (Ephesians 4.14). To bring God's people into the maturity that is appropriate for one who is to be adopted as a son (Ephesians 1.5), those given to the ecclesia of God by the Lord with a gifting to bring maturity into the body of Christ are to provide certain instruction.

According to Paul's epistle, this instruction centers around a Christian's position *in* Christ *in* the heavenly places or among the celestials, as rendered in the Concordant Version (1.3, 20), the "inheritance" awaiting the conquerors (1.11, 18), the very purpose for one's salvation (2.6-7), the "fellowship of the mystery" and God's purpose of the eons or of the ages (3.1-11), the essential need for maturity in *the* faith (4.11-16), the necessity of being filled with the spirit of God (5.18-20), and the spiritual warfare at hand (3.10; 6.10-17). All of this is in relation to the reign of the heavens coming to this earth that awaits the conquerors of Christ. This is what all believers are to be taught so that that they will run the race of *the* faith in such a way that they reach the goal or the end of *the* faith—the salvation of their souls (1 Peter 1.9).

After unveiling the revelation of this so great a salvation, Paul concluded his Ephesian epistle with: **Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil** (Ephesians 6.10-11 NKJ).

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In other words, believers must understand that they are in a battle and that they must engage in the battle in the proper way if they are to be victorious.

The battle is the Lord's.

The first lesson that we must learn is that the battle is the Lord's. We have no strength of our own, but we have the power of His might. Paul wrote of the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe (Ephesians 1.19). As we enter the battle, we must be strong in the Lord. It is *in* Christ that we battle. It is very similar to Joshua's situation as he stood on the brink of the Promised Land. The Lord spoke to him: **"Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them."** ... **"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go"** (Joshua 1.6, 9 NKJ).

Joshua and Caleb, along with a rebellious nation, had wandered in the wilderness for forty years until the first generation that had been delivered out of Egypt fell in the wilderness because of unbelief. What was their unbelief? They did not believe that they could conquer or overcome the giants in the land although God had given Canaan to them as their inheritance. But God had told them ahead of time that He would drive out the enemies gradually because they could not handle a swift and complete victory. God's wisdom is far greater than man's, but they listened to ten men instead of recalling God's promise and His strategy for fulfilling that promise.

"I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate, and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land." (Exodus 23.29-30 NASB)

Although the first generation had failed, Joshua was commanded to trust the Lord and be strong in the Lord who was with them. Joshua had grown up in the wilderness. He was no longer a child of God; he was a son who was taking the nation of Israel into the land as God's first-born son.

As it was with Joshua, believers are not to remain as children being tossed to and fro. They are to grow up into the *mature* knowledge of Christ in order to fight the good fight, putting on the whole armor of God. Joshua had matured in those years in the wilderness so that he was prepared to take up the Lord's battle, and it is to be the same with us today. Maturity is essential in this matter of standing against the wiles of the devil.

In Ephesians 4.14, Paul warned of "the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting," and then in Ephesians 6.11, he wrote of "the wiles (or schemes) of the devil." In other words, there is a strategy behind this move to draw away the Lord's people from *the* faith, to lead them away from their on-high calling. It is not a random

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event that happens in the lives of believers. No; the devil has a strategy, and he works this strategy through men (tares) and the dark forces (birds of the air) to try to deceive those who are destined for the throne. If we are not mature, having come into the *mature* knowledge of Christ and an understanding of what is at stake in this warfare, we will not know how to put on the whole armor of God and stand against the enemy. The devil is among the celestials (just like the giants in Canaan) and is scheming to keep out those who are destined to ascend the throne through the first resurrection in the day of Christ. He stands like Goliath the Philistine who stood before David. Although David was young in age, he was mature in his trust of the Lord, even more so than his older brothers and the other men of Israel.

The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.” Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.” (1 Samuel 17.44-45 NASB)

A child, a spiritually immature believer, is in no position to take up this battle nor does he have any way to properly clothe himself with the whole armor of God. It is a spiritual battle with an unseen force and this requires that the soldier be a spiritual man, not a babe in Christ (1 Corinthians 3.1-3; Hebrews 5.12-14). We must be able to discern the spiritual (1 Corinthians 2.13-15; 1 John 4.1). We must be able to stand against the schemes that are set out to destroy us, and this requires that we no longer be children. This standing is for overcoming or conquering the world-rulers of this darkness and one day realizing our inheritance of glorified, immortal, celestial bodies in the image of our beloved Lord Jesus (our heavenly land) during the coming reign of Christ and beyond.

Begin to possess it!

Today, we are to spiritually possess, in some measure, that which we are to inherit. In other words, we are to experience reigning with Christ in some measure. We see a type of this with Israel as they were at the end of their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Moses, recalling their long journey, spoke to all of Israel on the east side of the Jordan River. When they had approached the land of Heshbon, they had asked Sihon, the king of this land, if they could pass through his land. However, the Lord had hardened his heart so that He might deliver him into the hands of Israel. The Lord had spoken to Moses: **“See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to possess it, that you may inherit his land”** (Deuteronomy 2.31 NKJ). Sihon and all his people came out against Israel to fight at Jahaz. Moses declared: **“And the LORD our God delivered him over to us; so we defeated him, his sons, and all his people”** (Deuteronomy 2.33 NKJ).

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This is a type of the spiritual battle that the Lord's people are to fight today. Many enemies among the celestials are determined to rob us of our inheritance in the coming age. We are to engage in warfare with these heavenly forces, to defeat them while in the body so that we will reign with Christ in glory. We can begin to possess the spiritual reality of reigning with Christ now because Christ is the Victor and He is with us. The battle is the Lord's, and He will lead us to fight the good fight to defeat the enemy that is encamped among the celestials that are reserved for all who conquer. As Israel began to possess the land given to them by the Lord, so believers are to begin spiritually possessing their right to rule among the celestials in the age to come. After all, Paul wrote that we are seated among the celestials.

Yet God, being rich in mercy, because of His vast love with which He loves us (we also being dead to the offenses and the lusts), vivifies us together in Christ (in grace are you saved!) and rouses us together and seats us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus, that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2.4-7 cv)

We are called to begin to possess it, that we may inherit that which has been won for us at Calvary. This is why we are to fight the good fight and why we are to wrestle against the powers of darkness. If we continually endure by faith, we too will be able to proclaim as Paul did: **The Lord will be rescuing me from every wicked work and will be saving me for His celestial kingdom: to Whom be the glory for the eons of the eons** (2 Timothy 4.18 cv).

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

We must maintain the proper perspective on this battle. In Paul's epistle, we are reminded of the nature of the battle or the warfare.

Put on the panoply of God, to enable you to stand up to the stratagems of the Adversary, for it is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh, but with the sovereignties [principalities, rulers], with the authorities [the powers], with the world-mights [world-rulers, world forces] of this darkness, with the spiritual forces [hosts] of wickedness among the celestials [heavenly places]. (Ephesians 6.11-12 cv [ASV, NASB])

So often believers find themselves in conflict with people in the world as well as with brothers and sisters in Christ, and they try to battle with them. If we are maturing in the knowledge of Christ, we will come to understand that our battle is not against people (flesh and blood) but against the forces that are behind them. Paul had previously exhorted the saints to walk in love, not grieving the Holy Spirit. It was as if Paul was saying, "Look; don't battle against one another, against flesh and blood. The battle is against the dark forces among the celestials." These dark forces drive those who are engaged in the cunning craftiness of deceitful

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plotting. We need to know who the real enemy is and battle based on an understanding of its strategy.

Who are these dark spiritual forces among the celestials? They are called principalities, powers, world rulers of darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness among the celestials. These four descriptions of these forces are different ways to describe our spiritual enemies.

The word *principality* comes from the Greek word *arche*, which refers to “ruler.” This is the same word used in Ephesians 1.21 and 3.10, referring to world-rulers, and also in 1 Corinthians 15.24 in reference to Christ’s coming reign over the earth. Christ is going to reign until all rule (*arche*, world-rulers who hold positions of authority) and all authority have been completely put down.

The word *powers* is a translation of the Greek word *exousia*, which means “power” or “authority.” This is another way of describing those in positions of government. This is the same word that is used with *arche* (1 Corinthians 15.24; Ephesians 1.21; 3.10), that draws our attention to the authority held by a ruler among the celestials or in the heavenly realm.

World-rulers of this darkness refer to rulers of the world system or kosmos in which we live today. The word *ruler* is not the same Greek word as *arche* but the word *kosmokrator*, which comes from two words, which mean “world” and “to rule.” Thus, it means “world-ruler.” A better translation of these words would be “world-rulers of the present darkness” or “rulers of this present dark world.”

Finally, Paul wrote of *spiritual hosts of wickedness among the celestials*, which could be better translated as “spirit forces of the evil one,” referring to spirit-beings (angels), which are part of Satan’s host. All of these forces are “among the celestials” or, as worded in other translations, “in the heavenlies,” “in the heavenly places,” or “in the heavenly realm.” Satan is “the chief ruler,” “the ruler of the authority of the air” (literal translation of Ephesians 2.2) who is among a great host of powerful spirit-beings. It is this host of rulers that exercises governmental power and influence over the earth. I don’t think we should see this as some rule from a literal place but as a realm or sphere of operation. We cannot see this realm, but it is with us today. It is best to think of it as a realm, the spiritual realm that is quite real. We cannot see it with our physical eye, but those who are spiritual can discern it *in spirit*.

Thus, believers are not at war against flesh and blood humans but against powerful rulers of this present dark world who occupy various positions of authority in the celestial realm, which is the spiritual realm. Let us not forget that according to Paul we, who have received an earnest of the spirit of God by faith, are now seated among the celestials in Christ Jesus. This is a present reality; therefore, *in spirit in Christ Jesus* we have been brought into the very realm of our enemies so that we can effectively battle them.

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It is essential that we understand who the enemy is and realize that the enemy works according to specific strategy with a specific goal in view. Their goal is to devour those who are saved by grace through faith, drawing them out of the race of *the* faith so that they will not be qualified to reign with Christ in the oncoming eon as Christ sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.10). We must realize that spiritual forces of this darkness are to be reckoned with, even though they are a defeated foe. In Christ they are defeated, but we are left to battle them as part of our training and discipline for reigning in the kingdom of Christ.

However, there is a proper way to battle and an improper way to battle. Some people believe that all they must do is yell at the enemy and call him (it) all sorts of names. Actually, this is a sign of immaturity. Paul explained the means by which we must enter this battle and come out victoriously.

The whole armor.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Wherefore take up the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6.10-13 ASV)

Notice how Paul exhorted to be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. First and foremost we do not fight with our own strength but with the strength of the Lord. Our strength is in Christ alone; our strength is in His might alone. In other words, the position of battle is in no other place but *in* Christ. It is not in us.

Also, take note that Paul exhorts us twice; first to put on the whole armor of God and second to take up the whole armor of God. For what purpose? In order that we may be able to stand and to withstand in the evil day!

We are exhorted to do all (do all associated with taking up the armor) and continue to stand—not to retreat, to run away from the battle, or to sit down and relax. Stand! Stand against the schemes, the strategies of the devil, and hold your position in Christ, giving no ground to the enemy who seeks to devour you. We are on the side of victory, not defeat, and we are given the best armor in the entire universe. It is God's armor!

The reference note in *The Companion Bible* states: “Here are defined the *panoplia* of God. These are seven; three for enduement,—girdle, breastplate, shoes; two are weapons of defence, shield and helmet; two for offence,—sword and spear.” Consequently, Paul has given us the method to battle both for defense and for

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offense, which means we are not to be passive in this battle, but to be actively engaged in it.

Girded with truth.

Paul proceeded to explain the process of putting on the whole armor of God. He began with truth.

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth. (Ephesians 6.14 ASV)

When Israel was led out of Egypt (the world) as they were headed to Canaan, the Promised Land, they were immediately brought into the wilderness. They were to receive their inheritance in the land as God's first-born son with the rights of sonship. They were to be ruled by God as a theocratic nation. On the way to their inheritance, they were brought to Mt. Sinai to receive the Law, the word of God. After about two years, they came to Kadesh-Barnea, which was at the border of Canaan. They sent spies into the Promised Land who brought out some fruit of the land. They tasted the fruit of the land and it was good.

Thus, Israel started in Egypt with a basic knowledge of their calling as a nation. God added to this knowledge at Mt. Sinai, and they grew from a state of *gnosis* ("knowledge") to a state of *epignosis* ("*mature* knowledge"). They grew from children to sons in their understanding of God's call and purpose. At this point, they were ready to enter the land and face the giants (Numbers 13.32-33). It didn't matter if the giants were many in number or greater in strength than they were. God had promised them the land, and the battle belonged to the Lord (1 Samuel 17.47). If they attempted to go in on their own strength and not the Lord's, then they would be defeated (Numbers 14.42).

Only Joshua and Caleb saw that the battle was the Lord's and that they would surely conquer or overcome (Number 13.30). The rest of the nation of Israel did not hold to this truth and complained against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 14.2).

It is this same thought that comes into view for those who are the Lord's as we are called to gird our waist with truth. We were saved while in the world as Israel was (the blood of Christ was shed, and we were saved while we were yet sinners in the world), and we have been given the word of God as Israel was given the word at Mt. Sinai. Like Israel, we, with the word, are to grow up and progress from the *gnosis* ("knowledge") to the *epignosis* ("*mature* knowledge") of our calling. We are to come to the realization of our on-high calling to enter the heavenly land, which refers to us being raised in the first resurrection to receive both immortality and eonian life, and to reign with Christ in His coming kingdom. Those who are counted worthy to be sons of the resurrection will be able to transcend time and move in and out of the celestial, spiritual realm to minister to the Lord and the physical or earthly realm to lead the nations to Christ and His way of governance.

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Just like in Canaan, there are giants among the celestials today. They are the dark forces of intelligent spirit-beings (angels) that rule among the celestials in which our earth is enveloped. Just as Joshua and Caleb exhorted the people to enter the battle against the so-called giants, so we too are exhorted to enter the battle.

Believers are to gird themselves with truth like Caleb. *We shall surely overcome them!* Why? Because the battle is the Lord's and we are to trust in the Lord, being strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. This is being girded with truth, and it only comes once we have attained to the *mature* knowledge, which is a knowledge of what the battle is all about and the source of our victory. We are to enter this battle with sincerity and earnestness. Jude warned of the apostasy in the last days and exhorted the saints to contend earnestly for *the* faith (Jude 3). This is another way of stating Paul's exhortation to gird your waist with truth.

The breastplate of righteousness.

With the waist properly girded with truth, the Lord's soldier is to **put on the breastplate of righteousness** (Ephesians 6.14).

To understand the breastplate of righteousness, we need to see that there are two very important aspects of a believer's righteousness. First, as sinners, we have no righteousness of our own. In quoting Scripture, Paul declared: **"There is none righteous, not even one"** (Romans 3.10). This is the condition in which every man finds himself in relation to God. To stand before God we need to be righteous, but no sinner has a righteousness that can stand before God. This righteousness is reckoned to us in Christ.

Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification. (Romans 4.22-25 ASV)

When we believe on Jesus, He becomes our righteousness. When we believe, we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and this cannot be altered. It is continually on us, for when God looks upon us He sees the righteousness that has been reckoned to us through His Son. Actually, the righteousness is Christ: **Jesus Christ the righteous** (1 John 2.1); He has become for us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1.30). In other words, when God looks at us, He sees His Son. This righteousness is a fact, and we who believe are to hold to this fact; but it is not something that we have to put on. If we believe, we are already robed in His righteousness. Therefore, we do not put it on as a breastplate.

Isaiah has given us a word on the Lord's breastplate of righteousness.

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And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede; then His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle. (Isaiah 59.16-17 NASB)

This is a description of the Lord in battle array going forth to bring His wrath upon His adversaries. He is the Redeemer coming to Zion. Notice that He has put on righteousness like a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on His Head. What does this mean? It means that the battle is the Lord's; He alone brings salvation to Himself. He goes forth in the righteousness of God. His righteousness upheld Him.

Dear beloved in Christ, this is the sum of the whole matter of being strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. He is the Righteous One. He has brought and will yet bring salvation unto Himself. He is the Mighty Warrior who has and yet will defeat all the adversaries. He is the Savior of the world who will ultimately save all mankind, without exception, winning all His adversaries to God the Father so that God may be all in all at the consummation of the eons.

Now, once we see that all is in Christ when it comes to the battle and that He alone is our righteousness, there is a very practical side to the matter. It would appear that the breastplate of righteousness goes beyond reckoned righteousness. There is a daily, living righteousness that deals with our righteous acts.

In Revelation 19.8, the bride has been made ready and is clothed in fine linen, the righteous acts of the saints. This is the wedding garment of the bride, and it comes from righteous acts, which are performed by saints who exercise faithfulness within the sphere of their calling. All believers are called to be faithful to the Lord and to be in the will of God, serving in the Lord's house under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. As we exercise faithfulness to the Lord in His house, we will bear fruit or good works, which are righteous acts. As we do, we are putting on the breastplate of righteousness; and one day, we will be clothed with the fine linen of the wedding garment.

How can Satan effectively attack one who is doing righteous acts? He cannot! Good destroys evil just as light destroys darkness. He who does good is of God (3 John 11). We overcome evil with good (Romans 12.21).

John wrote much on this matter of righteousness. Consider his words.

And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him. (1 John 2.28-29 ASV)

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My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.... (1 John 3.7 ASV)

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (1 John 3.10 ASV)

It should be abundantly clear that, according to John, we are to practice (doeth) righteousness, and as we do, according to Paul, we are putting on the breastplate of righteousness. Another way of thinking of it is to think of the actions of a soldier. In battle, he uses his weapons to fight the enemy. A soldier must act; he cannot just sit on the front lines doing nothing. He must fight the good fight. We must act as well, and one of the weapons of warfare is to act righteously or to do righteous acts. In this way, the powers of darkness are robbed of power over us. Even more than this, the enemy is defeated through righteousness. But why would this defeat the enemy? Because at the heart of righteousness is the meaning that God is right. By practicing righteousness, we are declaring that we belong to God, that He has the right over us, that His will is right, and that we present ourselves to Him as His bondservants to do His will. This is worship in its purest form, something that Satan has sought since his fall (Isaiah 14.13-14; Luke 4.5-8).

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12.1-2 ASV)

Practical righteousness means that we have laid down our lives and presented our bodies as a living, holy sacrifice to God. This is proving the will of God. He is right, and He has the full right over our lives. This is good and acceptable and perfect. In this way, we are offering up worship that is pleasing to God.

There is more to be added to our understanding of the breastplate. In Paul's epistles, he refers to the breastplate in two different passages and in two different ways. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: **But since we are of {the} day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love** (1 Thessalonians 5.8 NASB).

Comparing the Ephesian letter to the Thessalonian letter, we discover *the breastplate of righteousness* and *the breastplate of faith and love*. At first glance, it might seem that these are two different types of breastplates, but in fact they are one and the same.

But first, what is a breastplate? It is armor designed to protect the body of the soldier. It protects all the vital organs, and most importantly, the heart. The heart

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represents love, and it will be shown that wearing the breastplate is a matter of love.

The three pillars of our walk are faith, hope, and love. Paul said, **“And now abide faith, hope, love”** (1 Corinthians 13:13; see Colossians 1:4-5). The Thessalonians were commended for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3). These three pillars are essential to us, and when we take up the matter of the helmet of salvation, we will see that this refers to hope.

Righteousness, faith, and love also are three inseparable pillars. In fact, the righteous acts are based on faith and love. Another way of stating this is that righteous acts spring forth from faith and love. We not only believe on Jesus and are saved by grace through faith, but we are to exercise faith in the Lord and in His name, and have a living faith based on love. As John wrote: **And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us** (1 John 3:23 NASB). This is a command to every born from above child of God, and when we obey this command, we find ourselves engaged in righteous acts.

James adds a further dimension to faith by stating that faith must be joined with works.

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”
(James 2:14-18 NASB)

James was not writing about justification by faith that we receive when we believe on Jesus. He was writing about being justified by works after we are saved. This justification is not in reference to immortality promised to all who believe; but rather, it is in reference to our entrance into the coming kingdom of Christ. The foundation of James' letter was the coming of the Lord and His kingdom (James 1:12, 21; 2:5; 5:8, 9). To receive the reward of the inheritance of the kingdom (Colossians 3:24), our soul must be saved in this day; and this comes by receiving with meekness the implanted word and by being doers of the word (James 1:21-22). James also saw the place of love as he reminded the brethren of the royal law.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well. (James 2:8 NKJ)

Now returning to Paul, we find that in writing to the Galatians, he joined this matter of faith and love. It is faith working through love.

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For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

(Galatians 5.5-6 NASB)

Faith working through love—this is the royal law. This is the breastplate of righteousness. We are called to be sober in this day as sons of light who have an active, living faith driven by love, which results in righteous acts. Love must be the foundation of all that we do—love for the Lord and love for one another.

The breastplate is designed to protect the heart, the most vital organ of the body of a soldier. Pierce the heart with the enemy's firepower and the soldier will die. Standing in the righteousness of Christ and doing that which is righteous guards our hearts from growing cold towards the Lord and His appearing and keeps us loving one another. Let us never forget His appearing. Our Lord has been gone a long time. We know Him in our spirit today, but do we long to see Him and feel His touch of love upon us? When John saw Him in His entire regal splendor, he fell down at His feet as a dead man. The Son of God's love came and laid His right hand on John.

Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1.17-18 NASB)

What assurance and comfort this must have been to John. He had walked with Jesus and knew His love for him; but when he was caught up *in spirit in* the Lord's day, all he could do when he saw the Son of Man was fall down as a dead man. What a vision! But also, what a vision of the love of Christ! He touched John and John was revived. This is love!

How can we continue much longer separated from the love of our life? Come, Lord Jesus! Oh, we need to pray for His appearing, watch for His appearing, and even endure for His appearing. It is love that watches and endures to the end unto His appearing. It is love that keeps us in the good fight.

The gospel of peace.

Next, we move from the body to the feet. As the breastplate is placed on the warrior, there is a need to have a firm footing; otherwise, there will be difficulty standing. Believers are exhorted to stand and to withstand; therefore, it is only right that attention must be given to the feet. But it is more than standing, for our feet must be shod in a certain way. After all, our Lord has been gone a long time to receive a kingdom. Standing can be tiresome and we need the right footwear to endure through to the end; otherwise, we will become fatigued and want to sit down, that is, not complete the race of *the* faith and end up sitting on the sidelines in defeat.

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Paul adds to the battle preparation: **Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace** (Ephesians 6.15 ASV).

Some people look at the gospel of peace and immediately think this refers to going out to preach the gospel of the grace of God to the unbeliever; but this is not what Paul is presenting. Remember that he is dealing with the spiritual warfare in which mature saints are engaged. The key to this verse is the word *peace*.

Scripture presents two types of peace—peace *with* God and the peace *of* God. *Peace with God* refers to our justification by grace through faith. Christ made *peace with God* through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1.20). Every saint has peace with God, just like every saint is robed in the righteousness of Christ. Through this peace, we are now on the sure foundation of Christ. There is nothing to separate us from the love of God because of this peace with God. This gives us a solid footing upon which to stand. When the enemy, the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12.10), comes and tries to steal this peace from our hearts through accusations, we stand firm in the fact that we are at peace with God. He even might tempt us to believe that God does not love us, that God hates us, that God is going to reject us. These are lies and we must stand on the truth during these times. Through God's Son, we have peace with God.

However, there is another peace, and that is *the peace of God*. In Philippians 4.1-7, Paul began by exhorting the saints to stand fast and to rejoice in the Lord, and he ended with: **“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”** Notice that this peace guards the heart and the mind—two areas of the body, which are protected by the breastplate and the helmet. It is this peace that allows one to have his feet firmly planted so as not to be persuaded by the things that are going on around him or the accusations that are coming from the enemy's camp. The peace of God is the firm foundation, and it gives us courage to battle from victory. Christ cannot be moved. Rejoice, for the victory is won in Christ. **But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Corinthians 15.57 NASB). **But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ** (2 Corinthians 2.14 NASB). Unfortunately, every believer does not hold to this triumphant shout and have the peace of God; therefore, they are not effective in the warfare. This is why the next piece of the armor presented by Paul deals with faith.

The shield of faith.

Faith is a critical piece of the armor; therefore, we must **take the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one** (Ephesians 6.16). It is interesting that Paul did not write that we must put it on. He simply stated that we must take it. In other words, it is something of which we take hold, and we take hold of it with our hands. We take it up and shield ourselves from all the fiery darts of the wicked one, which represent everything that stands against the word of God and every temptation that the enemy might

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throw our way. We take the shield with our hand to keep these fiery darts from hitting us and penetrating into our soul and spirit.

It is like going into a war and the commander of the army, who has sent out spies to size up the enemy, tells his troops that the enemy cannot win because he is an inferior foe who cannot stand. Upon hearing such news, the soldiers engage in the battle with full confidence that they will win. The shield of faith works in a very similar way.

Faith is simply believing God as He speaks to us through His word. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10.17). We are to read the word of God and discover what God has to say about a particular matter. What has God told us about His purpose and plan? **Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'** (Isaiah 46.10 NASB). In His word, God has told us the end from the very beginning and that His purpose will be established. What is His plan? His Son shall reign over this earth. Who will rule with Him? Many sons who will be brought to glory (Hebrews 2.10)! What did God tell us in the very beginning? Man will have dominion. Who will be cast out of the heavenly places so that man will have dominion? World-rulers of this darkness! God will accomplish all of this and more for His good pleasure. Do we believe it?

This is what faith is all about. It is standing on God's word and not being moved from what God has promised. It shall be done!

Rather than argue the point or debate the many arguments and false accusations that would say otherwise, we believe God and stand on His word. This is exercising our faith just like Joshua and Caleb did when they saw that they could conquer the giants. They did not look at their circumstances and doubt God. **Instead, they looked to God who is over all circumstances.** God promised them the land and that was all they needed to know. God is true to His word and never fails! But the rest of the nation of Israel believed the bad report of the other ten spies. They fell in the wilderness due to unbelief.

The exact same thing confronts believers today. Do we believe God and His word? Do we exercise faith in the living God? When we exercise faith, we are putting on the shield of faith. Joshua and Caleb put on this shield and thirty-eight years later they were allowed to enter the land. Likewise, believers are to put on the shield of faith by simply believing what God has to say about the coming kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. We have not received our celestial dwelling yet, a new, glorified body in the image of Christ, which is our promised land, so we must endure until that day, just like Joshua and Caleb did. We are reminded in the Hebrew letter.

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very

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little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Hebrews 10.36-39 NASB)

Faith endures. Why? Because we know that our King is coming! He does not delay. He is on schedule, for the Father has fixed the time. He will come! Until that day, the righteous are to live by faith, daily faith, and this involves taking up the shield of faith in the daily battle. A soldier does not shrink back but fights on to the victory. When we fight in such a way, then we will reach the end of the race and receive the outcome of our faith—the salvation of our soul (1 Peter 1.9).

The helmet of salvation.

Next, saints are exhorted to take up armor to protect the head: **And take the helmet of salvation** (Ephesians 6.17). This piece of armor has to do with hope.

As we already have seen, Paul wrote to the Galatians of the hope of righteousness; to the Thessalonians, he wrote of the helmet of the hope of salvation; and to the Ephesians, he wrote of the helmet of salvation.

For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. (Galatians 5.5 NASB)

But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5.8 NASB)

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6.17 NASB)

What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, although we cannot see it up ahead (Hebrews 11.1 TLB). Faith gives us the confidence to hope for what we do not see now. Faith tells us to stand fast in the firm belief that what God has promised will come. What has God promised? He has promised that His Son is coming again, and when He comes, He will take the scepter of the kingdom and reign over this earth for 1,000 years, and then usher in the new creation when He makes all new. But there is more to this promise and it deals with the very purpose of the creation of man, and more specifically, with those who have believed on Jesus. Man was created to have dominion and God has been working since the fall of man to fully restore all mankind, without exception, back to this purpose. God has promised to bring many sons unto glory to reign with His Son when His kingdom comes, and He will not fail.

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A helmet protects the head, so we are exhorted to protect the thoughts of our mind. In the heat of battle, we might be tempted to think that we will not make it, that the enemy will defeat us and we will not be found worthy of the kingdom and of entering into glory. The truth is that most of us, as we look at our lives, will be tempted to think that we are failures and will be disqualified in that day. In one sense, it is true. We are failures. At best, we all are unprofitable servants (Luke 17.10). So what is the solution? What is our hope? Our hope is the Lord Jesus Himself. **Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Colossians 1.27). Our hope is glory, and we can hold to this hope because we are in the One who will bring us into His glory. Our Lord Jesus Christ cannot and will not fail to bring His people into glory. **Christ Jesus, who is our hope!** (1 Timothy 1.1).

This is the hope that we are to have, and it is a helmet to guard our minds and our thoughts that might cause us to be tempted to believe otherwise. We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5.7); therefore, we are not to be moved by the things going on around us or even by the lying thoughts that might come to us.

The helmet of salvation guards our minds with the victory shout of Caleb as he considered the Promised Land that was set before Israel: **“Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it”** (Numbers 13.30 NKJ). We have a celestial dwelling, a glorified body out from heaven, as well as the celestial realm itself, set before us, and we are being called into this land, although there is an enemy occupying this realm today. He is a defeated foe and he will be cast out of the celestial realm (heavenly places). How do we know? Because God has told us so (Revelation 12.7-10)! With this knowledge, we can stand fast in the truth and overcome the enemy. Why? Because we are *in* the Victor and the Victor is *in* us. We must not be moved from this fact and must hold fast to Him. It is *Christ in you!*

When the accusations come our way and the flaming arrows of the enemy try to bring doubt and fear to our hearts and our minds, we must hold fast to our hope. Christ is faithful and He will bring us through, but we must hold fast to this hope, keeping our minds guarded with the helmet of salvation because **Christ {was faithful} as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end** (Hebrews 3.6 NASB). We must come to the place that Paul had come to at the end of his life: **The Lord will be rescuing me from every wicked work and will be saving me for His celestial kingdom: to Whom be the glory for the eons of the eons** (2 Timothy 4.18 cv). This is what it means to hold fast the boast of our hope firm until the end. What was Paul’s secret? He learned to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13.14) and to stand fast in Him in spite of the perplexity, the persecution, the daily dying to self (2 Corinthians 4.8-14).

Now, notice that it is the helmet of salvation. What is this salvation? As Peter wrote: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to**

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{obtain} an inheritance {which is} imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1.3-5 NASB).

We are called to put on the helmet, the hope of salvation, which is a clear reference to the second coming of our Lord. We must deny our self, laying down our soul-life daily, losing it in this life that we might save it (gain it) in the Kingdom Age (Matthew 16.24-27; Luke 9.23-26). Simply stated; losing our soul-life is the same as giving up our right to our self-life and yielding all rights to God. It is no longer I, but Christ (Galatians 2.20). This is the heart of righteousness. God is right! Or as Peter wrote: **Sanctify [set apart] the Lord God in your hearts** (1 Peter 3.15). We set the Lord apart in our hearts and allow Him to reign over us. We follow Him (Matthew 16.24; Luke 9.23; John 21.22), walking by the spirit (Galatians 5.25), and doing what He is doing (John 12.26). We no longer desire our will but His will. In this way, our soul is lost in this life to be gained or saved in the kingdom. If we are living in this manner, then we are putting on the hope of salvation that will guard our minds.

In the end, when our beloved Lord comes, it will be a full salvation. As Paul wrote: **Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Thessalonians 5.23 NASB). This is our hope.

The sword of the spirit—the word of God.

Finally, believers must take up **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God** (Ephesians 6.17). As we stand in the Lord and in His might, we battle the dark forces and the word of God is our weapon to fight the enemy. We could say that it is our ammunition and this comes from our mouth. We not only are to protect ourselves but to go on the offensive in this battle. We do this just as our Lord did when He was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. To every word of the devil, Jesus responded with the word of God (Matthew 4.1-10). This is how we are to battle. The word of God is our greatest weapon. It is our sword to battle the enemy. When the accuser comes and feeds us lies or half-truths (based on some part of Scripture), we respond back with the truth of the word, and we are not moved from it.

With God's living and active word at our command, we enter prayer warfare.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.... (Ephesians 6.18 NASB)

With the word and prayer we appeal to the throne of grace, and we never stop appealing, for our God is faithful to hear the prayers of His people. He sees all and knows every detail of the battle in which we are engaged. As in any war, it takes

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time to defeat the enemy and this requires perseverance. We must persevere before the throne, not only for ourselves, but for our brethren in Christ who also are engaged in the battle. We need one another's prayers to sustain us during the long battle.

In this way, mature saints are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, standing and withstanding until the coming of the Lord.

What is the heart of this matter of spiritual warfare? It is coming into the *mature* knowledge of Christ, which reveals to us the word of the kingdom. With this knowledge we stand in Christ. It is not standing in ourselves but standing in the Victor.

Let us put on the whole armor of God!

Let us be strong in the Lord and stand until He comes!

The following illustrates the road of the conquerors in Christ, the ones who conquer through Christ.

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Christ... The Hope of Glory!

The Danger

- Dark Forces
- Tares
- Birds of the Air
- Leaven



The Prizel

- First Resurrection
- Immortality
- Eonian Life

The Goal

- The New Jerusalem
- The Wife of the Lamb
- The New Creation
- The Kingdom
- Sonship/Reigning 

The Purpose

- Conformed To The Image Of Christ

The Way

- The Power Of His Resurrection
- Conformed To His Death
- Endurance

The Challenge

- Chastening/Discipline
- Persecution/Reproach
- Shaking
- Suffering
- Temptation
- Trial/Tribulation
- Spiritual Warfare



The Race & the Battle

- *The Good Fight Of The Faith*

"Take up your cross and follow Me!"

Live by the Spirit; Walk by the Spirit!

The Road of the Conqueror *in Christ*

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Scripture Abbreviations:

ASV	American Standard Version
CV	Concordant Version (Literal New Testament)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NKJ	New King James Bible

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