

 **LIVING ON THE EDGE™**

Spiritual Warfare 201

How to Prepare Yourself for Spiritual Battle

The Invisible War: What Every Believer Needs to Know About Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare

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How to Prepare Yourself for Spiritual Battle

You were rubbed with oil like an athlete—Christ’s athlete—as though in preparation for an earthly wrestling match, and you agreed to take on your opponent.

Ambrose of Milan

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Ephesians 6:13-15

Introduction: Basic Training

After the treaty that ended World War II was signed, pockets of guerrilla warriors continued to fight on hundreds of islands throughout the Pacific. The bullets were just as real, and the casualties were just as dead. In the same way, Satan continues to fight even after Jesus has won the victory.

1. Satan was defeated at the cross.
2. The penalty of sin was paid for all people and for all time.
3. Sin’s power was broken.
4. Yet Satan and his host of fallen angels continue to engage in guerrilla warfare to discourage, deceive, divide, and destroy God’s people and God’s program.

5. Believers are commanded to equip and prepare themselves in the strength of the Lord and in his mighty power to stand firm against the enemy's schemes, repel his multifaceted attacks, and engage and defeat him in specific battles.

Chapter 5

Your Personal “Code Red”

Théoden: I will not risk open war.

*Aragorn: Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not.
from J. R. R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings*

My father was in the South Pacific when World War II ended, and he used to tell me about a very unusual period at the end of the war. The bombs had been dropped, the Japanese had surrendered, a treaty was signed, and the Pacific was at peace. Well, on paper it was at peace. My father said that on islands scattered throughout the region, battles raged. Though the outcome had already been determined, isolated Japanese units hadn't heard of the surrender. They continued to wage guerrilla warfare just as they had been doing during the war. The bullets were just as real, the people hiding in tunnels were still committed to killing their foes, the mortars were just as devastating, and death was just as brutal. Young men lost their lives to an enemy who had already surrendered. There was nothing at stake between the two countries anymore; the outcome was final. But the fighting wasn't over. And it was just as deadly as it had always been.

That's a picture that captures exactly where we are in the invisible war. The victory is already accomplished; absolutely nothing is at stake in terms of the ultimate outcome of Satan's rebellion against God. What continues to be at stake, however, is the lives of those who are still fighting. The enemy knows the war is already officially over, but he wants to wreak as much havoc as possible while he still can. Demonic spirits are still intent on destroying the people of God, and their weapons are as real as they always have been. So are the casualties. Though the victory is won, it has not yet been completely enforced.

Satan was defeated at the cross. Nothing can diminish that. His defeat was irrevocably sealed when Jesus conquered sin and death by dying and rising again. The penalty we incurred for our sin was paid, and its power was broken. Through the cross, Jesus disarmed and triumphed over the enemy. We've been taken from the kingdom of darkness and reborn into the kingdom of light. We have been given a new beginning; the old things are past, and all things are new. We've even been highly positioned, seated with Jesus in heavenly places. Yet we are still in a war.

Why? Just as peace had to be enforced in the Pacific, Jesus's victory must be enforced in our world. One day he will come again and do that finally and completely, and evil will be completely done away with. Meanwhile, there is guerrilla fighting all around us, and the strategy of the guerrillas is to deceive, discourage, divide, and destroy God's people and God's program. They employ terrorist tactics, and our alert signals should always be on "code red."

God says he wants to equip us and prepare us to walk in his strength so we can withstand the enemy's schemes and repel his multifaceted attacks. When we follow God's instructions, given through Paul in his letter to the Ephesians and through the rest of Scripture, we will be able to defeat Satan in the specific battles in our lives — at work, in our families, at church, and anywhere else the enemy is active.

How does that play out in our lives? We went a long way toward answering that question in the first four chapters — becoming aware of the invisible war is the first step in winning it. If *Spiritual Warfare 101* helped you see beyond the external circumstances in your life to the spiritual influences that might be behind them, you've been properly enlisted and are ready for training. That's a major step in your preparation for conflict. You can't win a battle if you don't know you're in it.

There are four keys to spiritual victory (which is why this book is divided into four sections), and being aware of the battle was step one. Step two is basic training: appropriating God's ongoing

protection for daily living. In this and the next three chapters, *Spiritual Warfare 201*, we'll look at the ways we can defend ourselves and obey the command to stand firm. God has given us armor; it's up to us to learn how to put it on and use it. Engaging the enemy and discovering God's means of deliverance will come later in *Spiritual Warfare 301* and *401*, but we don't want to charge into battle without any defensive armor. If we don't know how to protect ourselves, we'll end up wounded very quickly.

How Can You Prepare Yourself for Satanic Attack?

Paul tells the Ephesians in 6:13–15 to take up the full armor of God so that they will be able to resist in the evil day. They are to do everything to stand firm. How? First, there are some basic pieces of equipment to put on — critical steps that every believer needs to take in order to withstand attacks. To communicate the principles of preparation, Paul uses the powerful word picture of a Roman soldier and his armor.

Before we go any further in this passage, remember that this armor is just a metaphor. Some commentators will argue that Paul was thinking of a passage in Isaiah in which God puts on a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation (Isaiah 59:17). Other commentators will argue that this Roman soldier is strangely missing some standard equipment, such as a spear and other accessories. If you are looking for precision, please just relax and envision the metaphor. It's a picture—a familiar picture to Paul's readers—to help us understand the general thinking of how we can guard our lives and prepare ourselves for battle.

It's also important to remember that the armor is a description of how we are to live out a dynamic relationship with Jesus. This is a lifestyle, not a checklist. These pieces of protection aren't things that we can mechanically pray onto ourselves each morning in a step-by-step routine. It is a visual aid to help us understand how to live out

a relationship with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is, of course, important to understand what these things are and apply them, but there's nothing ritualistic about them. Putting them on doesn't happen merely through a brief morning prayer time. It's a lifestyle issue—the product of weeks, months, and years of practice and cultivation. This is something we do, not a formula we recite.

Think of Paul's instructions in Ephesians, then, not as an equipment checklist but as a training manual in the proper usage of divine safeguards. This passage has all the elements of a drill sergeant of today calling the troops to assembly. If this were a modern scene, the sergeant would put his troops in rows and point to the equipment in front of each one of them. He would want them to know the ins and outs of their M-16s, the contents of their backpacks, the proper use of gas masks and of the special vial each one carries in case of chemical attack — every last instruction they might need before marching into the intensity of the battle. He would want it to be second nature to them so they would instinctively fall back on the appropriate tactics as the conflict raged.

But Paul lived in a different day, and the picture he uses comes from the most powerful fighting force of his time. Roman armor conveys a sense of power, domination, prestige, and military efficiency. This kind of soldier represents the empire's authority.

There is no way to interpret this key passage on spiritual warfare casually. Jesus is our Commander-in-chief—the highest authority we will ever have—and through Paul, he charges his troops with a sense of urgency. The tense of the Greek verb used in the command to “take up the full armor of God” indicates something that must be done right now, immediately, as soon as possible. This is a top priority.

Why is this command such a high priority? Because an evil day is coming. That's not a prophecy, just a fact. When Paul tells his readers to take up their full armor so that they will be able to resist in the

evil day, he is preparing them for the difficult times he knows are coming. He knows they will need to be fully prepared and enabled to withstand grave, dark times.

This term, *the evil day*, is an interesting phrase; it means “on a particular day at a particular time.” Why? Because the battles aren’t all the same. This conflict isn’t about a constant, invisible source that keeps coming at you consistently every day. There are specific opportunities when the enemy will try to deceive you, discourage you, or turn you away from your Commander-in-chief, the Lord Jesus. We’ve discussed earlier how the lion prowls around for vulnerable prey. There are times when you are on the top of your game, so the enemy waits. He watches your seasons and cycles, looking for the times when you are weak. When you are tired, when you’ve had a conflict with your spouse, when the economy drops and you suddenly see how much security you had placed in your retirement plan, when you’re in the ICU with one of your children and you wonder if he or she is going to make it—at any given moment of weakness, you can be tempted to think that God is not good.

Think about your experiences in prayer, for example. At some point in your life you have probably prayed and prayed for something that your heart desired deeply. As time passed, you may have wondered why God didn’t seem very responsive to you. But you waited because that’s what faith does. Then all of a sudden circumstances turned in the exact opposite direction from what you wanted. Not only did God not seem to be answering you positively, his will appeared to be contrary to yours. At just that time, you probably heard what every believer hears from time to time: a whisper that casts doubt on the goodness of God.

You know that little voice, don’t you? When circumstances don’t go your way, the whisper says, “See? God doesn’t hear your prayers. Why do you give your life to a God who isn’t listening?” If you’re a single person who is not going out and having “a good time” like most of your friends, and God’s provision for companionship still

is not coming as quickly as you would like, you may suddenly start wondering whether it's worth it to live a pure life. That voice will call you a fool and constantly remind you of all the fun you're missing. Or perhaps you prayed for guidance before you took a certain job and were sure you had received it. Six months later, when you find out that the job doesn't fit your skills, that it is draining you of time and energy, and that the benefits don't live up to what you were promised, the whisperer will say, "God has hung you out to dry. You asked him for help, and he led you astray. It's better just to do what you want than to pretend like you're understanding his will." Why? Because that's what the lion does. He waits for your weakest moments. There's an evil day.

That's why this passage is written in such an urgent tone. We need to be prepared not just to resist when we are strong, confident, and on guard but also to resist when we are least able to do it. There are no times in our lives as Christians when we can sit back and relax, confident that we are out of view of the enemy. He comes with different tactics at different times because he wants to catch us off guard. Just as a quarterback doesn't call the same play on every down, or just as a con artist doesn't try the same scam twice on the same person, Satan will vary his strategies against you and do everything he can to surprise you. He knows you will probably be prepared where you failed last time, so he will come at you from different angles. His timing is what defines for you what "the evil day" is. And your readiness is an urgent matter.

In my life, that evil day often comes after some of my most fruitful work for God. After I have prepared thoroughly, gotten "prayed up," preached with a sense of God's presence, watched God work in a powerful way, and then counseled numerous people afterward as they share how God used his Word in their lives, I often struggle with waves of depression, condemnation, and bizarre thoughts of temptation that come from out of the blue. I am very vulnerable during those times — especially if I'm traveling — so I've learned to place extra safeguards around me then. Take a minute to ask yourself

when and where you are most vulnerable. You'll be surprised how becoming aware of and preparing for that evil day can help you win a lot more of those battles.

After picking up our armor in preparation for battle, we are then commanded to consciously and vigorously make a decisive act (or succession of acts) to stand our ground firmly and fearlessly against the enemy's assaults (Ephesians 6:14). We may not know exactly how he will attack in the evil day, but we know what his goals are: to deceive, accuse, and discourage us.

Notice that our stance is not offensive at this point. We are standing on ground that we already have. Imagine, for example, an army that has taken a town. One of the first things it does is secure the strategic areas so that the enemy can't retake the territory that has just been seized. It costs a lot in terms of strategy and lives to gain ground; no one wants to give up what he or she has gained. That's the picture in Ephesians. We must not give up what we have already gained through our relationship with Jesus. If you're wondering what you have already gained, go back and read the first three chapters of Ephesians. We have been given a generous territory. We have come into the kingdom of light not only as full-fledged citizens but also as children of the King. Reading Ephesians thoroughly will give you a sense of just how extravagant God has been with us. We have his Spirit and his various gifts, we have been joined to the spiritual body of Christ, and we have been promised an inheritance that includes forgiveness, peace, and spiritual fruit. All of this is territory accomplished by Jesus and given to us by grace. When we prayed to receive Christ in faith, we received all of this as our possession.

As we walk in a manner worthy of our calling, as chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians tell us to do, that evil, whispering voice — or the circumstances that Satan exploits — will try to encroach on our territory and make our walk in the light very difficult. Surely you've heard it: "You don't really have peace, do you?" "God loves the world in general, but not you individually." "Why forgive people who

wouldn't do the same for you?" Step-by-step, the enemy will trespass on your life until the way you live and think are not much different from the way you used to live and think. He chips away until the new creature in you is obscured by your tendency to default to the old creature you once were.

So we are told to stand firm in the territory we have been given. It isn't that someone is just trying to knock us down. Someone is trying to steal the inheritance we have been given — or at least the experiential benefits of that inheritance. When we stand firm, we are holding on to our position, the area we already possess.

In order to hold our position, we need to be able to oppose and resist the enemy in the evil day — in other words, to stand firm. The grammar of the command here implies conscious and vigorous behavior in order to anchor ourselves on the possession God has won for us and to fearlessly withstand the enemy's assaults. His deceptions, accusations, and devious attempts to discourage can be firmly opposed if we understand the equipment we have been given. We must learn how to guard the territory that has been entrusted to us and not let our new position in Christ get undermined by our thinking, speech, and lifestyle. If you're wondering how this works out in everyday life with normal people like you and me, keep reading. We're just about to get there.

Personal Application: What about You?

A "code red" has been issued for your life; there is no opting out. Some people think they can avoid the battle if they just ignore it, but the battle comes anyway. There are only two responses: do nothing or prepare. But the fact of the battle is a given.

Are you prepared? Are you guarding the territory entrusted to you with all the resources God has provided? There is a divine strategy

and an array of supernatural armor and weapons at your disposal. When the opposition tries to seize your God-given inheritance — and it will happen; there’s no way to prevent the attempt — will your training be enough?

The next three chapters will explore how we can live out this new and abundant life by putting on the protective equipment God has provided. Each chapter will begin with an explanation of the metaphor and the role each piece of equipment played in a Roman soldier’s armor. After getting this snapshot in your mind, we’ll get into the meaning of the word represented by the armor — truth, righteousness, or the gospel. Then the most critical information in each chapter will be a discussion of what this armor actually looks like in real life for ordinary people like you and me.

That’s the cutting edge of our spiritual life — daily application. The key to living in victory and making the most of God’s grace begins with the armor we wear.

In Your Life

- Have you ever heard the spiritual armor described as a checklist? How would your spiritual life change if you knew that your protection was a lifestyle instead of a formula?
- Can you think of times when the enemy has exploited you at your most vulnerable moments? What weaknesses and tendencies of yours might give you a clue as to how the “evil day” applies to you?
- Is there any God-given spiritual territory you have already given up to the enemy? How can you take it back?

Chapter 6

Sifting through False Intelligence

*Satan deals with confusion and lies.
Put the truth in front of him and he is gone.
Paul Mattock*

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Sitting across from me was a man whose story I would have doubted except that I knew the facts firsthand. We were talking about a crisis in his life: his marriage had fallen apart, he was involved in an illicit relationship, and his children had rejected him. And he was desperately depressed.

By themselves, none of those things took me by surprise. I've counseled scores of men with those exact symptoms. But their stories were far different from his. In most cases they were either non-Christians or nominal Christians who were not walking with God. Their lack of committed discipleship resulted in some very poor and unbiblical choices that caused them great pain.

But this man's story was quite different. He had a godly family and a godly heritage. He was a man of the Scriptures who had taught Sunday school for years. He was a pillar in the church, having served on several boards. He was the kind of man whom everyone aspired to become.

So what happened? What could possibly bring down a man with biblical convictions, a loving wife, and a successful family and business? How could someone fall from such a blessed life to land in the depths of despair?

The answer is sobering. In his own words, he told me: "I had it all — a beautiful wife and family, stature in the community, a significant role in the church, a thriving business, a chalet in the mountains, a condo

on the beach, and all the toys you could ever imagine. I thought I was bulletproof. I thought God's hand was on me forever and that everything I touched would turn to gold. But I was wrong."

As he shared his story, he began to recount a tale of compromises in the smallest of issues: not dealing with a spat with his wife, taking that second look at a beautiful woman, telling small lies that led to bigger ones. "They all seemed so innocent and inconsequential at the time," he said. "But in a few years, they developed new patterns in my life. The lustful looks turned into a sexual addiction and then infidelity. The little lies became lapses of integrity that undermined all my relationships and destroyed my business. In very little time, I was living the opposite life of what I once had. In a word, I was deceived. Yet no matter how many people warned me, I couldn't see it. I was deceived into believing that money, sex, power, pleasure, and ego gratification were all part of the good life that I deserved and God wanted for me. I read my Bible and went to church, the truth ever before me. And I still couldn't see it. Now I'm alone, depressed, remorseful, and wishing like crazy I could do it all over. But I can't."

That isn't an uncommon deception. If we really want to learn the key to happiness — and honestly, who doesn't? — we are constantly told where we can find it. The incredible secret to realizing the meaning and joy of life is right in front of us. All we have to do is turn on the television and watch the commercials.

Isn't that what they promise? If you want that beautiful blonde to jump into your car, you have to have the right kind of car. If you want to enjoy life to the fullest, you have to drink the right kind of beer. If you want to be a confident, influential person, you need to dye your hair this way and treat your skin that way. Nearly every advertisement gives us a glimpse into somebody's idea of what happiness is all about.

Social media pings us with continual messages about happiness. We can "like" our "friend's" new hairdo, meal, car, vacation, home,

and kids. We can also know the second someone “likes” our post. Or better yet, check out the phenomenon of the selfie, a photograph that you take of yourself, typically with a smartphone, and then share via social media. A million-plus selfies are taken every day. They are easy to create and easy to retouch, allowing control over how you “look” and how you present yourself to the world. According to Samsung, selfies make up 30 percent of the photos taken by people between the ages of 18 and 24.

What is behind this obsessive drive to get more, look better, be unique, and be important in the eyes of the world? What was behind the tragic fall of the man with the almost-perfect life? Lies—a subtle yet effective system of deep, dark deception.

“Having Girded Your Loins with Truth”

The real secret to happiness isn’t anywhere in primetime entertainment, of course. The key to a fulfilled life has nothing to do with fast cars, revolving partners, or this year’s fashions. Those are just counterfeits with which the enemy and the flesh conspire to tempt us. And the remedy — the number one defense against this devious deception — is to clothe ourselves in truth.

A Roman soldier had a belt, and all the rest of his armor was somehow hooked to that belt. It was critical to the rest of the equipment. If it was wintertime, soldiers wore a long robe. The first thing a soldier would do to get ready for battle was “gird up his loins.” That’s a weird expression — most of us don’t gird up our loins when we get dressed in the morning. To a soldier, however, girding up was essential. He would lift up that long robe and tuck it into his belt so that he could move freely. On a march, he could have it down to stay warm. If he was off duty, he could unbuckle his belt. But if he was on duty and it was time for battle, an unbuckled belt and a hanging robe would mean one of two things: being punished by his superiors or having a severe disadvantage to his enemy. Either way, the consequences were grave.

So when the battle cry sounded, a soldier would lift his robe and tuck it into his belt, where his sword would hang and his shield would attach. The belt was central, and a lot depended on its being secure. The word truth in this passage means candor, sincerity, and truthfulness. It is rooted in the objective reality of the truth of God's Word. Here it refers to the subjective, practical application of openness and honesty in all things with God and people.

Paul has already told us that the truth is in Christ. He has already given us three chapters of truth, assuring us of what is now true of us because of our new life in Jesus. We are accepted in him, redeemed through him, adopted into his family, and sealed with his Spirit. These things are foundational, and they have all been done for us. But putting on the belt of truth is our job. We are to train our minds to see God, ourselves, and others through the clear lens of what he says is true. That means that we don't play games. We're honest with God, honest with ourselves, and honest with others. We're open when the Spirit of God speaks to us. We don't allow ourselves to be deceived, and we don't rationalize our sins away under the disguise of ignorance, relativity, or blame.

Our first piece of armor is a direct defense against the enemy's number one tactic. Do you recall from Genesis 3 what his first attack was? Deception. Satan was the crafty serpent, dressing up his lies to make them appealing and then whispering them into Eve's ear. He deceived her by questioning God's goodness, then by questioning the accuracy of the truth of God's command. "You will not die," he said—a blatant lie. Then he quickly followed up his lie with some appealing truth. "If you eat this, it will give you the knowledge of good and evil." He was right. That was accurate. That's what Satan

¹ Shea Bennett, "The Year of the Selfie—Statistics, Facts & Figures," *Social Times*, March 19, 2014, www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/selfie-statistics-2014_b55825.

does; he takes truth and twists it, making sin look appealing. Satan's modus operandi has not changed. He tells us that we'll never be happy unless we have a lot of stuff or until we look just right or until we have whatever he can get us to chase until we get it and need something more to satisfy us. The dissatisfactions deep within us — the very cravings that all those advertisements exploit—are the products of his lies. He convinces us we need more and more and more, and then he tempts us to get it in ungodly ways. And before we know it, we're buying the lies — hook, line, and sinker.

Have you noticed that? We can go to church on Sundays, read the Bible in the morning, pray our daily prayers, and still unconsciously let the media so infiltrate our thinking that we raise our kids just about the same way the world raises their kids and handle our money about the same way that the world does. That's what those pesky surveys by Gallup and Barna keep telling us. The fact is that the average Christian in America is strikingly similar to the non-Christian in the way we talk, act, and live. The level of honesty among Christians and the level of honesty in American culture at large are not much different. Why? We're deceived.

We don't know we're deceived, of course. I don't know many people running around saying, "I'm a deceived Christian. I don't really know what's going on. I get suckered every day in every way." When we're deceived, we're deceived. We think we're right on target. We're convinced we're doing the right things for the right reasons and with the right motives. Eve didn't bite the forbidden fruit while thinking to herself, "This is really going to be bad news." She thought she was making a wise decision, and the first bite probably tasted great. God had made it, after all. But she ate it based on lies, and she didn't even know it.

We tend to believe a lot of lies. Read the following examples and see if they don't sound all too familiar:

- Take care of yourself first and foremost. No one else will. (The

- American way, right?)
- The Bible was written centuries ago, and it's just not relevant anymore in some areas. (Besides, you'll look like an anti-intellectual fool if you defend the Bible in this day and age.)
 - Truth is relative. What's true for you may not be true for me. (Tolerance is the word of the day. And who are you to say what's right for everyone else anyway?)
 - We love each other. God understands that we have hormones and drives we can't control. Besides, we plan to get married soon anyway.

Satan's first attack was deception, and humanity's first response after sin was hiding, denial, and blame-shifting. That hasn't changed much either, has it? When we see the truth about ourselves, it's painful. It takes a lot of courage to face up to reality. It's easier for us to go into denial or to point a finger at someone else. We are very creative blame-shifters. We attribute our sinful reactions to difficult circumstances, a depressed economy, an unfaithful spouse, or anything or anyone other than ourselves.

The remedy is the belt of truth. Whoever or whatever we blame may actually be at fault to some extent in our situation, but until we get honest with God and with each other, we are playing with deception. Kenneth Wuest writes that the belt of truth is evident in the man or woman whose mind "will practice no deceit and no disguises in our intercourse with God." ²We need to own up to our own faults without excuses and without blaming, bring them to God, and confess them honestly before him. That's the only way to stand firm against deception.

I remember my first experience of not having the belt of truth on and being clueless about it. (There have been many, by the way.) As I was growing up, my father—who had been a Marine—drilled his life principles into me. "Son, this is how life works. Some people get up early, and some people get up late. So get up early. Some people

set goals, and some people don't. So set goals. Some people develop strategies and go for their goals; some people don't. So develop strategies and go for it. Some people want it bad enough; some people don't. So do whatever it takes to do the job and accomplish the goal." The underlying assumption to all these messages—the lie that was taught to him and passed down to me—was that this is the way to be successful, and if you're successful, you'll be happy.

By seventh grade I was an emerging workaholic. I had written goals for the kind of girl I wanted to date, what I would achieve in basketball and baseball, how I would earn good grades and make the honor roll, and how I would win a scholarship. I got up early, I set my goals, and I developed my strategies. By the time I was a senior, I had realized about 90 percent of them. One of the reasons I came to Christ was that God used a close friend to expose the lie by giving me a great compliment: "Wow, you've really got it made," she said, and she began to list all my "successes." As the words came out of her mouth, I realized I did "have it made" in a way—the way the world measures success. But at that moment I also realized that the formula didn't work because I was the emptiest guy on the face of the earth—and the phoniest guy too, because I had learned to develop relationships through self-centered strategies.

Shortly after that experience, I came to know Jesus in a personal way, and I was liberated. It was powerful and transforming. Someone gave me a Bible, and I just about devoured it. It seemed like whoever wrote it had been reading my thoughts and was speaking directly to me. A lot of my old goals were no longer attractive, and God began to give me new desires. I wanted to be his man. I went away to college and met a group of people who were great at discipling people like me, and I soon found myself whistling and singing and enjoying spending time with God.

But just because you go from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light doesn't mean everything negative goes away overnight. I found that people in this Christian group really liked you

a lot if you could memorize a lot of Bible verses, so I memorized twice as many as everyone else. They recommended being in a Bible study, so I decided not just to be in one but to lead one. I followed a rigid list of rules and never missed a day of prayer. I hung out with all the spiritual people on campus, and after about two years I lost my joy. I forgot all about the wonder and delight of my new relationship with Jesus. I became a legalistic Pharisee who knew a lot of verses but had no joy, a super-Christian who had no compassion for people. I was new in Christ, but I defaulted to my earlier principles: get up early, set goals, make strategies, and want it more than everyone else. The belt of truth was not on anymore. I was deceived.

Tragically, I was getting rewarded for my deception in this little campus ministry subculture. People would say, "Do you know Chip? He knows a lot of verses, he never misses a day of prayer time, and he shares his faith with everything that moves." That only reinforced my legalism. Then I reconnected with a girl I had met in my first year at college, and the conversation was brief, but I'll remember it forever. She looked at me and said out of the blue, "You know, Chip, I remember your first year here. You were a really neat guy. You just seemed so happy, and while I've never been real high on Christians, you made me think there might be something to it. But you've changed. Anytime I hear you, all you have is verses for people. All you have now is religion. If this is what it is like to be a Christian, I don't think I'd ever want to be one. See you later."

I was stunned. In fact, I was devastated. I felt like someone had walked up to me out of the blue and punched me in the stomach. Here I was, trying to be the best Christian I could be, only to learn I was turning off those I was trying to reach. She made me realize the difference between who I had been and who I became. It was just the slap in the face I needed to get me to stop and take a hard look at what abundant life is all about. My armor had not been on. I wasn't wearing the belt of truth. I had taken all of my old thinking and translated it into the Christian world, trying to achieve success, security, and significance based on my performance of the disciplines

of the Christian life. I was deceived into believing people would love and accept me only if I were a super-Christian.

That was twenty-five years ago, but I find that nearly every week as I spend time with God, I'm being deceived in some way that requires my putting the belt of truth back on. I'll realize that I haven't been exactly honest or open with some people or that I haven't quite been honest with God. And the Word of God will have to wash over my heart once again, because that's the mirror that lets me know what reality is.

You don't just put on the belt of truth in a quiet time some morning or with a quick prayer in the car. It's a process. It comes through long, significant seasons of being with God, not out of duty but out of longing to hear his voice. It comes when we stop ignoring that uncomfortable lack of peace, that disquieting voice in the back of our minds, and refuse to cover it up. Our tendency is to put on a movie or turn on some music whenever we're alone because God's voice is easier to ignore that way. We don't like to hear it because we're being deceived. And for many of us, it has been a very long time since we unzipped our heart and said, "Lord, show me anything in me that doesn't line up with who you are."

So how about you? Where has your belt of truth slipped? In what ways are you blaming others, playing games, and hiding from God?

For years, I would hide for days at a time when I knew things weren't right with God. I assumed he would be mad at me for not coming clean. That's the deception. God is not a cosmic cop but a loving Father. I've learned that the moment I stop, really get honest, and come clean with God, I meet a loving, forgiving God who is full of grace and mercy and who wants to restore my sense of peace and bring integrity to all of my relationships.

That can happen only after we are honest—only when we're willing to put on the belt of truth and live with openness and humility.

When we do, something painful but wonderful occurs. It's called brokenness. That is when we see the truth about who we really are.

When I saw how hypocritical I was and how far from Christ-likeness I was, I literally wept. And I still have to do some of that. I'll write to God in my journal about how I postured myself in a meeting that day in order to appear confident or impress people or how I see some arrogance coming into my relationship with my family or my colleagues. Defensiveness occurs when God brings truth into our lives and we won't receive it. We justify ourselves rather than confess the reality of our faults. So I'm learning to put on the belt of truth and let it break my heart. That's okay. Psalm 34:18 says, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." The Spirit of God is always a friend of truth, especially when it hurts.

Personal Application: What about You?

David, we are told, was a man after God's own heart, but that doesn't mean he had it all together, does it? He wasn't always the epitome of moral righteousness. So what made him a man after God's heart? When David was confronted with his sin, it broke him. After his sin with Bathsheba, he did what we all do: denial, blame-shifting, and cover-up. But when God brought Nathan the prophet to David to help him see the truth, it broke his heart. We have the record of his repentance in Psalm 51, but I think we see some of the fruit of his repentance in Psalm 139.

David learned to keep short accounts with God, and he learned that knowing the truth—even if it was painful—was the best way to do that. In verses 23–24 of Psalm 139, David prayed: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me. And lead me in the everlasting way." That is a really good prayer to pray every day. "Lord, search me. As far as I know, I'm right with you and my other relationships are okay, but

I want to know if I'm being deceived." Then when God speaks, listen. He won't speak in vague condemnations: "You're a bad person," "You need to be a better parent," and generalities like that. He will convict you about specific things for which you can repent.

His desire is never to condemn and always to draw you back into intimate relationship with himself.

In Your Life

- Do you know people who get defensive when God (or someone else) points out the truth? Do you do that yourself? What does that indicate about their (or your) spiritual armor?
- It is often said that everyone wears a mask. In other words, insecurity drives us all to posture and pose in certain situations to make a good impression on others. How can the truth of our position in Christ help us take off our mask?
- Can you think of a past experience in which God pointed out some deception in your life? How did you apply his truth to that situation?
- How would your relationship with God change if you spent time daily in His Word? What if you prayed Psalm 139:23–24 every day?

Chapter 7

In Sync with God

The demons say one thing to get us into sin, and another to overwhelm us in despair.
John Climacus

One of my colleagues spent the first decade of his ministry under an extremely heavy burden. He loved and served God, but it was never enough. There were always more souls to save, more mouths to feed, more wounds to heal, and more conflicts to resolve. And woe to him if he rested in the midst of such crying need. God had a zealous agenda, and my friend dared not neglect it.

That may sound like the hard labor of a servant-hearted saint, but there was a lot of guilt behind it. When my friend shares how he came to Christ, the joy of salvation is only a small part of the story. Almost immediately after his conversion, he began to see God as a hard taskmaster who was angry with his people for still not getting the gospel to the entire planet, even after two thousand years. This man worked for God because God required it and because he felt extraordinarily guilty if he didn't. He served out of obligation and fear—a dread of the condemnation that would come if he slacked off—rather than out of love and joy. He was motivated by an overbearing sense of painful duty.

That's a common condition among earnest Christians. Some people spend their whole lives going to church because they would feel guilty if they didn't. They give money not because they long to be involved in eternal work and to bless people but because they know they are supposed to. They volunteer when asked because they will condemn themselves if they don't. Or they don't volunteer at all because they just live with condemnation all the time.

Guilt plays out in our lives in very warped ways. It is often at the root of dysfunctional families, eating disorders, sexual addictions, and addictions to drugs and alcohol. More subtly, though, it's just a whisper from the enemy that says, "You call yourself a Christian, but if anyone knew all the things you do—those secret sins behind closed doors, the way you hide your insecurities with clothes and surgeries, the emotional dysfunction you inflict on others—they'd keep their distance from you. A Christian? You'd be exposed as a fraud! God isn't going to hear your prayers. He isn't even going to take you back. You've failed him too many times." Guilt is a killer.

It doesn't take long for us to be smothered in condemnation. It isn't that we aren't truly guilty. Some people deny that there is such a thing as guilt—no morals, no consequences, no problem. No, guilt is real. But so is forgiveness, and God's grace is greater not only than all our sin but also than all our guilt. Satan's first mode of attack was deception, but he follows it up with heavy doses of condemnation. And the second piece of armor we need to put in place will protect us from it perfectly.

"Having Put on the Breastplate of Righteousness"

A Roman breastplate was usually made of bronze, or, if you were a more affluent soldier, chain mail. It covered the midsection and then some, from just below the neck to the thighs. And they called it a heart protector—for obvious reasons. It guarded the vital organ that keeps us alive.

That's what Paul tells us to put on after we've girded ourselves up in the belt of truth. The next piece of equipment is the heart protector—the breastplate of righteousness. No one would dare go into battle without it.

What exactly does righteousness mean? You may be tempted to give up if you think it means you have to become perfect before you can be protected, but don't give up just yet. That's not what this is

about. The word righteousness in Ephesians 6:14 means “uprightness, right living, integrity in one’s lifestyle and character.” It is a matter of conforming our will to God’s will. It is rooted in the objective righteousness that we already possess in our standing before God through Christ’s work. That righteousness cannot be taken away. It is complete because we are in Christ and he is in us. But while the righteousness of this verse flows out of that objective reality, this is really the practical application of truth to our lives. In other words, the righteousness referred to here is submitting to the lordship of Christ. Put simply, it’s putting into practice what you know is right.

Accusations that Wound

There’s a reason Satan is called the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). When we fall into sin, the Holy Spirit will convict us and draw us through repentance and forgiveness back into fellowship with the Father. But Satan will counterfeit the conviction with accusations. The whisperer who laughs, “You call yourself a Christian?” is not the voice of the Holy Spirit. That’s demonic, and it is designed to drive you into false comforts to ease your guilt. For example, buying seventy-five pairs of shoes because when it’s too painful to face the truth and you feel condemned, shopping will give you an adrenaline rush to take care of it—for a while. Or stuffing yourself in order to drown your pain in pleasure—and then throwing it all up as you kick yourself for being so addicted to food. Or becoming the dispenser of personal information in your congregation because you need to feel significant. It’s all in the form of prayer requests, of course. “Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so are going through a difficult time in their marriage. You heard what she did, didn’t you? They need lots of prayer.” “Pray for that family that has been visiting. Did you know they had to disconnect the cable because their kids got into some of those perverted sexual issues?” Eventually, you become the garbage can of the church. But you feel significant, and it eases your conscience. Almost all of these games

we play are designed to muffle the enemy's accusations.

The breastplate of righteousness is essential when we have been honest with God, accepted his revealed will (the belt of truth), and then put into practice what he has told us. The condemnation comes, and we stand our ground and say, "That's a lie, Satan. I'm complete in Christ." Or, if there's truth to his accusation, "That's a lie, Satan. That was true—I really was a phony. But I'm not anymore because 1 John 1:9 is true: If I confess my sins, God is faithful and just to forgive my sin and cleanse me of all unrighteousness. Did you get that? All unrighteousness." You stand your ground because you believe what God tells you. You are complete in Christ, you are pure in him, and you reject the trash-talking that evil, demonic whisperer is spouting off at you. When he tells you that food will soothe your discomfort, expensive purchases will ease the pain, or sexual satisfaction—however you can get it, moral or not—will make you feel all better, put the truth into practice. "I have real intimacy; I don't need that. I know the source of real satisfaction; I'm not going to play any more games." Satan's accusations and heavy loads of guilt and shame cannot pierce the breastplate of righteousness. In Christ we are righteous, and in practice, we are being conformed to his image.

Do you detect a sense of urgency in this? I hope so. The time to feel victimized and overwhelmed is over. We are not victims of our compulsions. The whispers telling you to try harder (so that you'll fall harder when you fail) are not the Holy Spirit. God doesn't want you to try harder. He wants you to apply the truth now, rely on the power you presently possess, and by faith put on the breastplate of righteousness. You do not have to live where the condemnations of your heart take you.

Here's what it looks like when we do not put on the breastplate of righteousness—in other words, when we willfully rebel against the truth God has shown us. We open ourselves to demonic attack. That's the implication, isn't it? We are to put on the breastplate as part of our protection against the enemy's attacks. If we don't put it on, the

result is vulnerability to his attacks. We open ourselves up to full frontal assault from the spirits of darkness.

Biblical Examples of Breastplate Malfunctions

Does that seem too strong? If so, let's take a look at what Scripture has to say about it. In 1 Samuel 13, Saul, the first king of Israel, heard God's instructions through the priest Samuel. Saul was about to go into battle against the Philistines, but first he was to wait at Gilgal for seven days until Samuel arrived to offer a sacrifice to God. But seven days passed, and the enemy was gathering. The men were afraid, morale was low, and some of the troops were beginning to scatter. Saul took matters into his own hands, deciding it was better to please his men than to please God. He made the sacrifice himself and then rationalized his behavior. From the moment he disobeyed what he knew was true, he opened the door to demonic activity in his life.

That tendency to disobey turned up again and again. Two chapters later, Saul understood God's truth: he was to go to battle against the Amalekites, put them all to death, and destroy everything that belonged to them—including their livestock. But he turned away from truth and chose self-sufficiency over God-dependence. Saul obeyed most of God's instructions, but not all of them. He spared the Amalekite king and the best of the sheep and cattle (1 Samuel 15:8–9).

God rejected Saul as king because of these two incidents, and for the rest of Saul's reign, he was consumed with jealousy and fits of insanity. Demonic activity pursued him relentlessly as he lost touch with reality and turned inward, growing bitter and vengeful toward people who had done him no wrong. His moods swung up and down, and his relationships crumbled. Saul was a king without a breastplate of righteousness, and he lost the battle.

This dynamic isn't confined to the Old Testament. Jesus asked his disciples a question one day: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). His disciples gave him a quick summary of popular opinion on Jesus's identity. Then Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter, who didn't exactly say the right things at the right times, nailed this one. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Jesus told Peter that this was a revelation of the Holy Spirit and that Peter did a great job seeing the spiritual reality of Jesus's identity. He even blessed Peter as "the Rock" and declared that he would build his church on this truth. Then Jesus went on to tell the disciples the rest of the game plan. He would go to the cross, suffer, and die and then be raised. Peter, just off of one of history's most Spirit-inspired declarations, rebuked Jesus for such ridiculous notions. "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." Jesus's response is brutal but accurate: "Get behind Me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to Me" (vv. 22–23). Peter had heard the truth from the Son of God's mouth, rebelled against it, and opened the door to a statement straight from Satan.

What's In Your Heart?

Consider this question carefully before you answer it: in what area of your life has God spoken his truth to you that you are not currently following? Are you deceived? There are Christians reading this book who resemble me in college—a first-class Pharisee. Others of you head a ministry at your church, read your Bible every morning, listen to radio preachers, pray for your friends, family, and ministries, and yet you are still walking in deception. You may have anger fantasies about your ex-spouse, even though the Bible has some really clear things to say about bitterness. You may not have spoken with someone in the church for five years because of some past offense, even though the Bible is very clear that we are to forgive others the way God has forgiven us. You may not give very much of your time, your talents, or your treasure, even though the Bible is emphatic

about giving the first portion of your resources to the Lord. For others, the duplicity reveals itself in little or no concern for those who are perishing outside of Christ, even though the Bible commands us to build bridges according to the way God has made us in order to bring people out of darkness into the kingdom of light. We are people of flesh, and we all grow deaf to God's clear instructions from time to time while fully convinced we are following them completely. That's deception; it results in unrighteousness, and that leads to vulnerability in the face of demonic attack.

Have you opened your heart to demonic activity in any of these ways? I'm not suggesting that your bed is going to start shaking, that you'll have visions and weird phenomena coming at you, or that you'll fly into a jealous rage like Saul. You will, however, miss out on the abundant life God has given you if you are constantly living under condemnation and guilt. So many of us go on for years clueless about what's missing in our spiritual lives, only to one day realize we have been ignoring God's clear instructions to us. Listen carefully: an unprotected heart is asking for deep, life-threatening wounds.

Many of you just got nailed with some sharply pointed truth. You may be going right to that place we talked about at the beginning of this chapter: guilt and condemnation. "Money . . . forgiveness . . . sharing my faith . . . deception and demonic attack. Ouch." Before you wallow in shame, let me encourage you. We all do these things. The solution isn't condemnation; it's restoring our honesty with God and allowing him to clothe us in his righteousness in practical ways. Matthew 6:33 says to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. That means we make time for God every day. And he understands days that are crazy—this isn't a legalistic requirement. It just means that he is to matter most to us. He is our most important relationship, evidenced not by our lips but by our lives. And if he isn't, we have a breastplate to put on. We know the truth; all that's left is to follow it.

Does that mean you have to be perfect? Of course not. It means you deal with the areas God has shown you. If he has shown you that you watch too much television, then scale back. If he has shown you a bad habit with food, break it. If he has shown you some issues in your marriage that you can't resolve outside of counseling, then get a counselor. Just do it. Whatever God has shown you, regardless of your fear, take the first step. Once you do, he'll give you grace. The first time you give back to him off the top of your income, he'll give you grace. The first time you forgive someone whom you really don't want to forgive, he'll be there to fill your heart with grace. Change your schedule, your diet, your goals in life—if he has shown you to do something, he will give you power and grace to do it. The breastplate of righteousness is not that difficult to put on when God is helping us.

If we aren't wearing the breastplate of righteousness, our hearts are being condemned by the enemy and our minds are being deceived. Instead of our lives reflecting the supernatural, winsome love and holiness of Jesus, we are religious people working hard to please God and impress people in our own strength. That's a heavy burden to bear. We can't do it ourselves, and God doesn't want us to. He wants to help us walk in his truth and his righteousness and guard ourselves against the enemy's deceptions and accusations. And grace—that "will to," "want to," and "power to"—is always abundant when he is our first priority.

Personal Application: What About You?

James 4:17 says, "To the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." The fruit we bite into against God's instructions is sweet on the front end—there is an initial reward when someone clicks on that porn site, takes food he or she doesn't need, or harbors resentment. But it is bitter fruit to swallow. It will destroy us. Not just hurt us; destroy us.

A chapter on righteousness can easily end up with a legalistic flavor to it. I know that. That's not what this is about. Every command God gives you is for your own good because he loves you. These instructions flow from a concerned Father's heart. His promise is that you can know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32). God gave you rules about priorities, money, bitterness, relationships, purity, and all aspects of your life not because he wants to burden you with restrictions but because he wants you to get his very best. He wants you to have real peace, not artificial peace that comes from eating, shopping, or vacationing. He wants you to have a clean heart and experience his power, not brief moments of holding problems at bay. The last thing he wants is for you to self-destruct. He does not want you standing in the middle of an invisible war without any protection over your heart. The breastplate of righteousness—your righteousness in Christ working out practically in your life—is a God-given safeguard. Put it on every day, moment by moment. And wear it well.

In Your Life

- How can you tell the difference between the Holy Spirit's conviction and the enemy's condemnation?
- The thought that rebellion opens us up to demonic attack is frightening—and sometimes hard to swallow. What would you tell someone who thinks that obedience is not really a big deal to God?
- Is there anything God has shown you to do that you are not currently doing (or that he has shown you not to do that you are currently doing)? If so, what?
- What statement does our disobedience make about our relationship with God?

Chapter 8

Bombarded by Doubts

*The devil can counterfeit all the saving operations
and graces of the Spirit of God.*

Jonathan Edwards

The first year of my Christian life was one of the most delightful and difficult times I can remember. My new relationship with Christ brought a freedom that I had never experienced. I found myself singing and whistling or just plain being happy in ways I had never experienced before. To be accepted just as I was, to be forgiven absolutely and completely, and to know that God wanted to speak to me every day in the Scriptures was almost more than I could take.

But along with the new delight were some grave difficulties. I didn't grow up in a Bible-teaching church or home. I came to know Christ only a few months before I went away to college. I was reading the Bible on my own because I couldn't put it down, but I didn't have a clue as to how this new life in Christ was to be lived.

I couldn't explain why things were happening inside of me. I just knew that they were. I didn't realize the Holy Spirit had come into my life and that since He is holy, He was creating holy desires within me. My friends couldn't understand when I didn't want to go barhopping with them anymore. I'm not sure I could understand it myself, except it just wasn't fun anymore, and it made me feel dirty. Those kinds of changes were encouraging, but some things didn't change very easily at all.

Though I didn't know a lot of the Bible, I knew that swearing and using God's name in vain were not things I wanted to do anymore. Yet time after time, I found myself slipping into old patterns and

hearing things come out of my mouth that made me feel guilty and ashamed. I also knew that using and manipulating people for personal gain—especially girls—was out of bounds with God. Yet I found myself repeatedly defaulting to my old ways. I felt such shame that I wondered if I really had a relationship with Christ.

I didn't know it at the time, but the enemy was whispering those doubts in my heart on a regular basis. It may sound funny now, but I probably asked Christ to come into my life at least twenty times that first year. I didn't understand my position in him or how his grace dealt with my sin and failure. I was always doubting, always unsure, and always living with piles of condemnation and overwhelming guilt. I came close to giving up—in fact, I once officially decided to quit the Christian life—because I couldn't stand being a hypocrite. I almost fell into Satan's trap. I was within an inch of becoming a casualty to the enemy's bombardment of doubt. I almost lost my footing.

“Having Shod Your Feet with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace”

Roman sandals were strapped up to the knee and tightly fastened to the soldier's leg. The soles had knobs and sometimes nails protruding from them—an ancient version of athletic cleats. Alexander the Great is said to have invented these or at least championed them. He gave credit for many of the Greek army's impressive victories to the firm footing of its forces. When soldiers have a solid foundation, they can stand unmoved against their opposition. They don't slip or lose their balance very often if their feet are gripping the ground.

That's the picture Paul wants us to have of ourselves: soldiers with feet solidly planted in certainty. That's also the picture any athletic coach wants his players to envision. When I used to coach basketball, I would tell my kids to bend their knees and get down. To play defense well, they had to keep a low center of gravity for balance and footing. They hated to do it, but they couldn't defend unless they got down low. A wide receiver in football has a lot of trouble when

the turf is slick or his cleats are not long enough. Why? Because you can't make a sharp cut if you don't have a firm foundation. We even apply this principle to our toddlers. When they are learning to walk, we don't make it hard for them by putting them in socks on smooth, hardwood floors. We put them on a carpet or dress them in slippers with rubber grips on the bottom so they won't get hurt. If footing is crucial in sports and childhood, how much more crucial is it in the high-stakes, life-or-death, invisible war?

Imagine putting on the belt of truth to guard against Satan's deceptions and the breastplate of righteousness to guard against his condemnation. Your vital organs are protected. But what good will that do you if you can't keep your footing? You have to be able to support all of your equipment with the kind of foundation that will allow you to keep your backside off the ground.

The word preparation in this verse means "establishment." It conveys two ideas: knowing the gospel inside and out and being ready to share it. When we are well grounded in the mercy of God in Christ and are prepared to extend his mercy to others, we are on solid ground. That kind of readiness brings peace on both fronts—within our own hearts and between God and people who need him.

We've discovered that Satan's primary tactic is deception, and he follows it up with condemnation. The belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness guard us from those tactics. But he also specializes in casting doubt on the very basis of God's goodness and the means by which we receive it: the gospel. He always attacks grace.

My daughter had a friend who had fallen victim to that attack. This Christian friend was convinced that no one could really be sure of making it to heaven. You just do your best and hope, she believed. That's the approach of a lot of false gospels, of which there is no shortage in this world. The paths of many other religions are steep and winding, demanding perfection from their travelers. The natural

tendency of a fallen human being is to rely on good works and to push all the right buttons to possibly have a chance of getting to heaven. When that self-oriented approach to God seeps into a Christian's life, it's hard to recover. If grace has been undermined in a believer's mind, self is all that is left—hope in our own resources.

But when failure comes, like it did in my life, then the only conclusion one can draw is, "Maybe I don't really belong to Christ." And if we can never really know, we become a pawn in the hand of the enemy—forever plagued by doubts about our worthiness before God. We revert to a performance orientation, and when our self-effort fails, the result is often that we are tempted to give up—which I almost did. Few things will undermine joy and abundance in a Christian life as much as that.

This is the "different gospel" that Paul addressed in Galatians: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another. . . . Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6–8). Later in the same letter, Paul calls the Galatians fools. They had begun in the Spirit and then thought they could be Christians by human effort. They had fallen for a lie (Galatians 3:1–14).

Satan loves to cast doubt by offering another gospel—another Jesus or another way to salvation. Jesus may be a part of the scheme, but not as the Son of God who paid it all. That makes the false gospel even more deceptive. Jesus is in the middle of it, but his atoning work is ignored. Satan adds to the gospel of grace through faith, making it a gospel of grace through faith plus works. And then he convinces us we've never done quite enough works.

The tactic of another gospel is the essence of 2 Corinthians 11:3–4. Satan comes to us as an angel of light. He makes the lie look good. It seems to be Christian or deeply spiritual or charitable and

compassionate, and it's usually mixed with a whole lot of truth. But it's still a lie. And Satan offers his alternatives right after he lays the groundwork with his whispering doubts. "You don't really believe all this, do you? I mean, the God who created the entire universe becoming a man, living a perfect life, dying on a cross, and then being resurrected? You have to give the first portion of your hard-earned money to a church full of sinners, and you have to live a boring, righteous life in a world that's having a lot more fun. When are you going to quit playing these games and stop falling for this religious garbage? You don't need that crutch anymore. After all, you're an educated person. This is what they spoon-feed to the gullible and ignorant. Is that what you want to be?" Satan wants us to fall for an easier gospel, a prettier gospel, or a more socially respectable gospel. Can you see how you must have a firm foundation when you hear that voice?

The solution is pretty simple. It is to immerse ourselves in the fundamentals and foundations of the Christian faith as it is revealed to us in the Bible. God's Word is very clear that we are sinners in need of salvation, and we cannot help ourselves. But he sent his Son into the world to live a perfect life and to die as the full payment for our sin. God's holiness and our guilt have been satisfied completely. By faith, we accept the sacrifice of the Son of God and live by the power of his Spirit. That's the gospel, and there is no other. That is what we strap on our feet and drive deep into the turf, and it is on this that we stand our ground.

Personal Application: What About You?

What does that look like in our lives? First and foremost, we need to know and understand the gospel clearly, as concretely as it is presented in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6 and Ephesians 2:1–9.

I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless

you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time. (1 Corinthians 15:1–6)

There is nothing ambiguous about that. Paul presents a gospel that is rooted in space-time history. This is not a dream, not a religion, and not just one option among many on the religious salad bar. It is not possible to believe this gospel and then conclude that we are left to find peace and fulfillment in some out-of-body journey or wherever we can find it. This is about a real-life, historical figure. Paul dares his readers to check it out for themselves, and he told them that if this gospel was not verifiable the Christian faith was in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). This bold claim is entirely dependent on objective reality, not subjective experience. The Good News—and that’s what gospel actually means—is that Jesus died on a cross to pay for our sins in full, and those who trust him are forgiven and absolutely clean. The power of sin is broken, Satan has been defeated, and Jesus has made us free.

Second, we need to know the basis for our eternal security and the assurance of our salvation. If you are ever feeling insecure about your salvation, read Romans 8:38–39: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And if you ever need heavy doses of assurance, spend some time in 1 John 5:11–13: “The testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Ephesians 1:13–14 promises us that God’s Spirit has sealed us and made us God’s own possession.

My daughter's friend could have found a lot of peace in these passages. So could a young man I once met. He was in a college singing group that traveled to churches to give concerts during which group members would share their testimonies. I was standing next to him after a concert in our church, and he said he wanted to ask me a question. So we talked a little bit, and it turned out that he was really struggling with doubt. He was weighed down by guilt and condemnation—the breastplate of righteousness could have prevented that—and as a result, he was seriously questioning his salvation. Here was a guy who had been doing Christian work for years, and he was completely paralyzed by overwhelming doubts, wondering whether he was in the faith or not. His foundation was slipping. His feet were not securely shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

I can relate. When I've been traveling a lot, living on two or three hours of sleep each night, and then run into a difficult time or a conflict with someone I care about, I don't really feel like reading the Bible or praying. Fatigue, stress, and discouragement can make anyone feel very un-Christian. It can happen to anyone at any time. I've even felt that way on overseas trips specifically to teach other people about Jesus. Then the whisperer gets in my ear: "You have just been telling thousands of people about Jesus, and you don't want to read your Bible or pray? You're a real phony, aren't you?"

That's a really good time to remember that faith is based on facts—the objective reality of the gospel of peace—rather than on feelings. You can eat a bad enchilada and have some negative feelings. Feelings come and go. But the gospel is rooted in truth, and we have to be able to tell the enemy that we know we are saved because we believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is hard, rock-solid fact. Our momentary mood does not tell us whether or not we are in the faith.

Finally, I want to encourage you to do something that will powerfully

strengthen your faith and help you become established. It may seem threatening at first, but ask God for specific opportunities to share your faith. Telling the gospel to others is one of the most amazing faith-builders available—or, as they say, the best defense is a good offense. You don't have to be a passionate evangelist on the order of Billy Graham or Luis Palau. As you identify with Christ, you can share your faith according to your gifts and personality when the opportunity arises.

The most vibrant time I ever had in terms of my confidence in God's goodness was when I played basketball overseas with some other Christian college players. We played throughout South America. On a slow day I would share the gospel ten times, and on a good day, twice that. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was the power of God for salvation, and that power is felt not only by the one who hears it but also by the one who shares it. You can be tired and worn out, but when you see the supernatural message being used by God again and again, you suddenly realize that you are part of something powerful and eternal. That summer as I shared my faith time after time, it became natural. I realized that the power wasn't in the messenger but in the message.

As you share the gospel, you will realize that the foundation of your faith is strong, clear, and intellectually defensible. Doubt will begin to disappear. Your shoes will become more deeply and firmly planted in the ground.

In Your Life

- Have you noticed at which times in your life you are most likely to question God's goodness? Why do these times leave you vulnerable to doubt?

- How much does your faith depend on your feelings?
- When you notice your faith coming and going with your mood, what steps can you take to ground yourself more firmly in the gospel?
- Practice sharing your faith with someone before answering the following question. (If that's scary for you, start with a believer you know well and who will encourage you.) Did your confidence in the gospel increase or decrease when you shared your faith? Why? You can also find resources to help you share your faith in the series "Share the Love" (available at LivingontheEdge.org).

What You Need to Remember

God has objectively defeated Satan and his agenda. He has delivered us from sin's penalty and power, and ultimately he will deliver us from sin's very presence. In the interim, we are involved in guerrilla warfare with demonic forces.

As believers, we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, with all the rights, privileges, and position that being a child of God entails. The spiritual battle we fight involves a responsibility on our part to put on the spiritual protection that God has provided for us. We can and will resist the enemy's attempts to deceive, accuse, and cast doubt when we stand firm against him by:

1. Being honest with God, ourselves, and others as a prerequisite to all spiritual battle,
2. Responding to the truth that God shows us about his will for our lives—righteous living,
3. Clearly understanding the gospel and habitually sharing this message of grace.

The great majority of spiritual warfare need never go beyond the regular practice of living out our position in Christ by faith. Our practice of Paul's metaphor of the spiritual armor protects us from Satan's ongoing attempts to break our fellowship with Jesus and, as a result, greatly minimizes any impact by the enemy.

There are times, however, when we must move beyond standing firm and engage the enemy in actual combat. This will be the topic of section 3 (Ephesians 6:16–17).

Equip Yourself for Spiritual Battle

Discover What Every Believer Needs to Know About Satan, Demons and Spiritual Warfare



Resources include:

Book (English & Spanish) • CD • MP3 • DVD
Study Guide • Small Group Kit

For more on this topic, visit
LivingontheEdge.org