



Soldiers of Christ –
Arise!

**A SERIES OF BIBLE STUDIES
ENCOURAGING CHRISTIANS TO LIVE
VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVES**

Brian Caughley

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SOLDIERS OF CHRIST — ARISE!

Soldiers of Christ – ARISE! – and put your armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of Hosts and in His mighty power,
Who, in the strength of Jesus trusts, is more than conqueror!

Stand, then, in His great might, with all His strength endued,
And take, to arm you for the fight, the full armour of God.
To keep your armour bright attend with constant care,
Still walking in your Captain's sight and watching unto prayer.

From strength to strength go on; wrestle, and fight, and pray,
Tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day,
That, having all things done and all your conflicts passed,
You overcome through Christ alone and stand complete at last!

— Charles Wesley (1707-88), adapted

INTRODUCTION

One day, a few years ago, I felt that the Lord was saying: "Church – get ready! Here I come!" Not that I necessarily believed that Jesus would return in the next 24 hours or even the next decade, but I believe the Lord was saying it is time for the Church to wake up, rise up and be the people of God they are supposed to be: sons and daughters of the living God, children of the King, soldiers in the army of the Lord of Hosts!

It has been said that the Church is a "sleeping giant". If that is true, then it is now time for this "giant" to awake, arise and exercise its mighty power!

Soldiers of Christ – Arise!

This call goes out to all true Christians — men and women, young and old: Arise and unite as an army under the leadership of the Lord Himself.

Put away all the trivialities, frivolities, and hindrances. Put on your armour. Gird up your loins. Arise, for there is a battle at hand — a war to be fought against satanic principalities, against vain human philosophies, against occult powers, against the spirits of humanism and false religions (including pseudo-"Christianity").

Let the true Church arise as an exceedingly great and mighty army, to serve the King of kings and pull down the strongholds of the enemy!

Throughout this book I have endeavored to be soundly Scriptural, rather than be based merely on experience. Scriptures are either quoted in full or their references given. Moreover, lest we be accused of merely taking only literal Old Testament examples, spiritualizing them and then applying them out of context to New Testament Christianity, we have sought to lay a firm Biblical foundation especially from the New Testament.

One further point that needs emphasizing: it is *most important* that we constantly remember that we are *not* fighting or praying against flesh and blood (people); our battle is primarily against the principalities and powers of darkness (even though they frequently work through people). We should pray for people with love and compassion, even though we may hate

some of the things they say and do, and things that they stand for. As Jesus Himself prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"Church – get ready! Here I come!"

This book is a humble effort to encourage Christians to prepare themselves for the days which lie ahead – days in which God will visit us both in judgement and in revival; judgement where there is persistent sin and rebellion, but revival where God finds a prepared and ready people.

So ... ***Soldiers of Christ – Arise!***

1. FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

"This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that, inspired by them, you may wage the good warfare [or, fight the good fight], holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:18-19).

We are living in a world in which there is an increasing resistance to warfare, and a real desire for peace. People are tired of war; they live in fear of a nuclear holocaust. Pacifists are growing in number and in strength as they seek to force governments to reduce their armaments.

As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). It is not for us to hate, kill and destroy, but to love and to seek to reconcile people, first to God, and then to one another. But while we are not called to fight against men; while our weapons are not guns and bombs, and our enemies are not people, nevertheless there is a battle to be fought: a battle against the "powers of darkness", against evil, and the wicked spirits behind it.

We are all called, as Christians, to "fight the good fight" of faith. This fight is just as real as a physical battle, but its results have **eternal** consequences!

The word "fight" in 1 Timothy 1:18 means "to make war" or "to wage war". It will be a battle, just as real, and even more important, than worldly battles, but it is a **spiritual** battle, not a physical one.

1 Peter 2:11-12 says, "Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. Maintain good conduct ..."

So the lusts of the flesh are one thing we have to wage war against, in order to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. "As for you, man of God ... aim at righteousness, Godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

The aim of our fighting — why we engage in spiritual warfare — is that righteousness, Godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness might triumph over their evil counterparts — unrighteousness, ungodliness, unbelief, hate, defeat and violence. These good virtues will never be victorious without a fight, because the evil nature within each of us, driven on by the powers of darkness, will never give up without a struggle.

The word "fight" in 1 Timothy 6:12 means a struggle, a conflict, striving or labouring fervently against something. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 compared this fight to boxing, "I do not box as one beating the air, but I pommel my body and subdue it". We need to make sure that our spirits control our bodies, and not vice versa. Too often the flesh dictates what we do, not our spirits. We need to subdue our bodies — and this will involve a struggle!

Paul also describes some types of praying in terms of a spiritual battle. He says, "Epaphras ... greets you, always remembering you earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12). The words "remembering you earnestly in his prayers" are literally "struggling on your behalf in prayer". As we intercede for people we may well have to struggle earnestly on their behalf. Praying is not always easy! (Note how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22:39-46).

For the true Christian, this struggle, this battle, is neither optional nor something that only occurs once or twice: it is constant. It calls for perseverance and patient endurance. But what a sense of joy it must bring when we reach the end and, looking back as Paul did, see the victories: "The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished

the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6- 8).

Good soldiers of Jesus Christ

"Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him" (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

We, Christians, are called to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The Church is an army. (See Ezekiel 37:1-10, which is a picture both of Israel and the Church).

The word "soldier" in 2 Timothy 2:3-4 is being used in the spiritual sense, but it is exactly the same word as is used for a literal military soldier — one who fights battles! In other passages Paul refers to his friends in Christ as "fellow-soldiers" (Philippians 2:25; Philemon 2).

Battles in the Christian life

Some of the areas of spiritual conflict and warfare are as follows:

1. **Against the lusts of the flesh** (1 Peter 2:11)
We are not to passively resign ourselves to sin and to Satan! (The name "Satan" means "adversary" — one who opposes and who contends against us, and one who, by the grace of God, we are to fight against and defeat). The Christian life is **not** passive!
2. **Against the powers of darkness** (Ephesians 6:10-13)
There are evil principalities and powers (evil spirits, demons, devils, fallen angels) against whom we must fight. We will never see the victories worked out here on earth until we have first won the battles in the heavenly places over these powers of darkness.
3. **Against sin and evil** (1 Peter 5:8-9; Romans 7:14-25)
The world is full of sin because men's lives are full of sin. The Bible describes people's hearts as "deceitful and desperately wicked (corrupt)" (Jeremiah 17:9).
We must fight against all that is evil and sinful. We must "put to death" (destroy) the old nature (Romans 6:6, 11-13; 8:13; Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 4:22-24).
4. **Against vain philosophies and arguments** (2 Corinthians 10:5)
We live in a very intellectual world, and many of the battles we face today are ideological, philosophical, arguments of the mind and intellect. Much unbelief, humanism, etc., is a battle of the mind. We have to tear down these arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and His will. For example, humanism replaces God and God's will with man and man's desires; it is thus idolatry — and idols need to be destroyed!
5. **In Intercession** (Colossians 4:12)
Intercession not only involves coming to God with other people's needs; it also involves spiritual warfare against demonic attacks on people. In order to see victories won in people's lives, and the answers to our prayers, there may well be spiritual battles that have to be won first. For example, in the area of witnessing, Satan does not easily let go those who are part of his kingdom. Battles need to be fought and won over the souls of the lost before they can be brought out of darkness and into the Kingdom of God. This may be one reason why Jesus said, "The Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone enters it violently" (Luke 16:16). There is a struggle involved in people's salvation; there are battles to be fought and won through intercession.

Soldiers of Christ: Arise, and put your armour on!

QUESTIONS

1. What is a "peacemaker"?

2. What are (a) some similarities, and (b) some differences, between physical warfare and spiritual warfare?
3. Who or what are "the powers of darkness"?
4. "We need to make sure that our spirits control our bodies, and not vice versa". What does this mean?
5. What are some of the areas of spiritual conflict that Christians face?
6. Christians do not passively accept everything that happens as being God's perfect will. Why?

2. SPIRITUAL WARFARE

"Though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

There are many similarities between spiritual warfare and physical, worldly warfare, and we will look at some of them in later studies, but there are also some profound differences between the two.

1. Christians are not called to engage in physical warfare but they are called to engage in spiritual warfare. Jesus never used physical weapons against people; His "weapons" were love, prayer, a Godly example, the preaching of truth, and divine authority.
2. One of the things that worldly war does is to breed hate, bitterness, resentment, division and various other lusts of the flesh. Christians are called to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ... do good to those who hate you" (Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 6:27-28).

While we may hate, and be totally opposed to, various evil philosophies, and some of the things some people may say and do, we must always **love people** and see them as those for whom Christ died (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). We hate sin and its evil consequences; we hate lies; we hate what opposes the Lord and His ways, but we love people.

What does it mean to love people? It means to genuinely desire the very best possible for their lives, and to work and pray towards that end. To love people does not mean we condone their sin in any way.

So, although, we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly battle. We see behind the outward, physical manifestations to the spiritual and ideological powers behind them. Our news media are constantly filled with examples of carnal ("bad") warfare; our places of prayer are to be constantly filled with examples of spiritual ("good") warfare, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ battle against the powers of darkness, sin and evil.

God has given us spiritual weapons that have "divine power to destroy strongholds". What are some of the strongholds of the enemy that we should be attacking and destroying?

Satanic strongholds

1. Unbelief (Hebrews 3:12)

God, in His Word (the Bible), has stated many truths and given many promises. If we want to know His promises we need to read His Word. Unbelief, therefore, is a direct affront to God. Unbelief says, "God is not true to His Word; I cannot believe Him or trust Him". This, of course, is close to blasphemy.

No book in history has been more attacked, maligned, burned or destroyed than the Bible, yet it continues (almost 2000 years since it was completed) to be the world's best seller! Unbelief is a Satanic stronghold aimed at undermining or preventing faith. We must fight against unbelief.

2. Vain ideologies and philosophies (Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; Titus 3:9)

Paul describes these in 2 Corinthians 10:5 as "arguments and proud obstacles". In almost every case, it is not that a person cannot believe with their mind, it is that they will not believe

with their will! Most vain arguments are a cover-up for being unwilling to believe in and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The arguments are our excuses for sin, unbelief, and disobedience.

Closely related to this is humanism, and its essential corollary, evolution. In order to deny (or ignore) the existence of God, the theory of evolution is essential. And having accepted the theory of evolution, Man becomes its apex or pinnacle — Man becomes "god". This is idolatry — a "proud obstacle to the knowledge of God", that needs to be destroyed.

3. The occult and false religions

We inherently know that there is a spiritual dimension to our life, and if the devil cannot stop us from seeking after it, he will substitute a demonic counterfeit — the world of the occult and/or false religions — to keep us from God. These are Satanic strongholds that need to be torn down.

People can become so spiritually bound by the occult or by false religions, that they become blinded to the truth and cannot come to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour until they have first been set free from these demonic bondages. Praise God, Jesus came to set people free so that they could see and believe and be saved! (John 8:31-36).

4. Sin and Satanic powers

Sin, particularly persistent sin ("bad habits"), and other Satanic powers in a person's life, also bring bondages from which people need to be set free. One of our tasks in intercession is to pray against these things so that people can be loosed from all evil that holds them back from God and can be free to love and serve Him.

"Pull down ... build up"

The Lord said to Jeremiah (1:10), "I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant". The Lord was obviously speaking spiritually here, for Jeremiah was not a king nor was he in the army; he was a prophet and an intercessor — in other words, his ministry was spiritual, not carnal (physical or worldly). God gave him spiritual authority over nations and kingdoms. Note the two-fold application of this authority:

- to pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow ("negative")
- to build, plant ("positive")

In spiritual warfare, **both** these aspects are important. There is a time for praying against all that which is evil, against bondages, all that is contrary to the Lord and His will, every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and obedience to Him. This "negative" aspect of spiritual warfare is like clearing a building site before building a new building: the old building, which gets in the way, is first demolished — broken down, destroyed, removed — before the new building is built. God does not try to renovate that which is evil or corrupt, He destroys it and creates something new and good.

There is little point in trying to build the new, until the old is first totally removed! Sometimes it seems to take longer to "do the groundwork" than to actually build! Notice that God uses four terms for demolition — pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow — but only two words for construction — build, plant. Perhaps we have underestimated the importance of preparation, "clearing the ground" by spiritual warfare through intercession, and wonder why we have had so little success in building and planting.

In a later study we will look at "binding and loosing", which is similar to "pulling down and building up".

What do we pray against?

If we not only pray positively **for** things, but we are to also pray **against** certain things, what do we pray against?

1. **We pray against sin and evil.** There are many evil and sinful things happening in our world — things which are displeasing to God, and harmful and hurtful to people. We are to pray against these.
2. **We pray against Satanic strongholds.** There are certain areas where Satan has a real hold over people, over leaders, over governments, etc. We need to pull down these strongholds of the enemy. (In a later study we will look at "binding the strongman").
3. **We pray and fight against the powers of darkness.** There is a spiritual war going on: the Lord and His people versus the powers of darkness. We will find, as Christians, that we often experience general Satanic opposition in our lives. This is not abnormal! Sometimes it will be stronger than at other times. The devil especially opposes (through frustrations, sickness, temptation, etc.) those who are seeking to be obedient to God and do His will. While we are assured of victory, there will still be battles to be fought — and won!

Christians are not called to passively accept, condone, or compromise with evil, sin, false religions, etc. We are to stand up and speak up against all that is displeasing to God. We are to engage in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness, and see the Kingdom of God extended as God gives us the victory through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. What "strongholds" need to be destroyed? (2 Corinthians 10:4)
2. What does "take every thought captive to obey Christ" mean? (2 Corinthians 10:5)
3. What are our "spiritual weapons"?
4. What are some vain ideologies and philosophies that keep people from God?
5. Why is "pulling down" important before we "build up"? (Jeremiah 1:10)
6. What should Christians be praying **against**?

3. WHO IS OUR ENEMY?

Our enemy is not people. While we may hate and be angry at the actions of some people (with a perfect hatred and righteous anger!) it is not primarily people that we are waging warfare against. It is not "flesh and blood" but the spiritual powers of darkness that motivate and even drive them to do their evil deeds.

In the Bible, our enemy is known by many different names and descriptive titles, each of which give some insight into their nature and character.

John 8:44 Jesus said to some people, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy."

Revelation 12:7-10 In these four verses the enemy is called: the dragon and his angels, the great dragon, the ancient serpent (Genesis 3:1), the devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, the accuser of our brethren.

It appears from Revelation 12, together with Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-17, that Satan was originally one of God's angels (Lucifer, which means Light) who, because of pride and rebellion, tried to make himself equal with God. Because of this, God cast him out of Heaven, together with the angels who rebelled with him (about one third of all the angels), and they were cast down to the earth.

Satan is now the ruler of the evil principalities and powers — evil spirits who, in the spiritual realm, control the minds and hearts of those who belong to the kingdom of darkness.

Sin, hatred, rebellion and all evil are ultimately inspired by Satan and these demonic powers. People possessed by such evil spirits are driven to do evil deeds and become bound in their hearts and lives so that they are unable to control their evil habits.

The angels who were cast out of Heaven with Satan are known as fallen angels, evil spirits, demons, devils, evil principalities and powers; while Satan, their king, is also known as the devil, the serpent, the dragon. Satan is a liar, a deceiver, a usurper, a thief, a destroyer, a murderer, an accuser.

Ephesians 6:10-13

"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood (that is, people), but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

We need have no fear of the enemy, for God has made every provision for our victory over him. On the Cross, Jesus cried, "It is finished!" Satan was stripped of his authority and power over believers; in Christ we are victorious! "Fear not!" the Bible says over and over again. We are to stand strong in the Lord and the power He give us. He has provided us with the armour and weapons that we need in order to be victorious — always!

We are not fighting against people but against evil principalities and powers, spiritual rulers in the kingdom of darkness and hosts of evil spirits in the heavenly places. Usually, but not always, these evil powers work through people whose lives have not been committed to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. People are the agents through whom the enemy works, working to oppose the Lord and His ways, afflict His people and attack the Church. Just as God has chosen us, His people, to work out His purposes here on earth, so Satan uses non-Christians to work out his evil purposes here on earth.

But the battle has been won — Christ is Victor! "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world", Jesus said (John 16:33).

In Daniel 10:12-21 we have an Old Testament example of the conflict that goes on in the heavenly places between God's holy angels and Satan's fallen angels. Daniel had been fasting and praying for Israel's release from captivity but a demonic principality ("the prince of Persia") was withstanding his prayers being answered. So the Lord sent Michael, one of His angels, to contend against this evil principality. Later, "the prince of Greece" was also to come. Thus we see a spiritual battle raging in the heavenly places as the powers of darkness seek to oppose the Lord and His people. But Daniel's prayers and fasting for three weeks were heard by God; as always, the Lord was victorious and the people of God were released from 70 years' captivity, just as God had promised (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10-14).

The Lord and His people are always ultimately victorious, but not without a spiritual battle first. Thus we see that the devil is a liar, a deceiver, a usurper, a thief, destroyer and murderer. He causes fears, doubts, confusion, unbelief, etc. The Bible refers to the kingdom of darkness as comprising Satan (its head), evil spirits, fallen angels, demons, devils, evil principalities and powers. Praise God that we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have been saved out of the kingdom of darkness and have been placed into the Kingdom of God. Hallelujah!

Deliver us from evil

As part of the Lord's prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Deliver us from evil" or "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 is the gift of the ability to distinguish or discern between spirits — to know what is of God's Holy Spirit and what is of the devil. The ability to discern between good and evil, and between truth and error, is most important, and something for which every Christian should pray. Even young children need to learn this in order to be kept from evil, deception and error.

We need to accept, embrace, hold onto and obey that which is good, true and holy; and reject, renounce and have nothing to do with that which is evil, false, ungodly. And we need to know the difference between the two!

Nowhere in the Bible are Christians told to be tolerant of that which is evil or false. "Deliver us from evil" should be our desire and prayer. In an age in which "tolerance" and compromise are the catch-cries of humanists, atheists and others, Christians must stand against, and pray against, everything that is evil, sinful, false and displeasing to God. There is an enemy to be resisted. Rather, there is an enemy to be fought against and conquered, in Jesus' Name. Compromise and tolerance of that which is anti-Christ and His will, are not part of our vocabulary.

In praying "Deliver us from evil", what are we asking? We are praying for victory over sin and temptation. We are praying against all evil, corruption and sin in the world — morally, spiritually, socially, politically, etc. We are praying against the evil one — Satan and his host of demonic powers. We are praying against false cults, false religions, idolatry, etc. We are

praying for the downfall of the kingdom of darkness and the extension of the Kingdom of God on earth.

While there will always be an enemy to contend with, as long as we are alive on earth, our prayer in the meantime is "Deliver us from evil, and give us the victory through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". One day, when we depart from this earth, for us the battles, will be over. Death is the glorious entry into the presence of God, the final victory. Hence the Bible says, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). In this world there are many battles to be fought and won, many enemies to be defeated, but Christians' victory over death is their final battle — then they enter into this reward — eternal life in the presence of their Father in Heaven, where there is no more evil, sin, sickness or death, and no more battles to be fought. Hallelujah!

"Thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57)

QUESTIONS

1. Who is our enemy?
2. In our thinking, and in our praying, it is very important to differentiate between people, and their evil thoughts, words and actions. Why?
3. How would you explain to a new Christian what are "principalities and powers, world rulers of this present darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12)?
4. How can we overcome any fear that might arise from thinking about (or when praying against) evil principalities and powers? (2 Timothy 1:7).
5. What is "the gift of discernment" (1 Corinthians 12:10) and why is it so important?
6. When should a Christian **not** be tolerant and **not** accept compromise?

4. THE HEAVENS, HEAVEN, AND HEAVENLY PLACES

In the New Testament the word "heaven" is used in three different ways; Paul, for example, in 2 Corinthians 12:2 refers to the "third heaven".

1. The heavens

The heavens refer to the physical, created sky, the air or atmosphere, the stars and clouds; the firmament. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

The word "sky" in Matthew 16:2-1 is the same work translated "heaven" in verse 1, and in other parts of the New Testament. Jesus referred to the stars falling from heaven, the powers of the heavens being shaken, and the clouds of heaven (Matthew 24:29-31); the word translated "heaven" is the same in each case. When there was a three-and-a-half-year drought, Jesus said "the heaven was shut up" so there was no rain (Luke 4:25. See also Acts 14:17; James 5:18). Jesus also referred to "the birds of the air (heaven)" in Luke 13:19.

One day, when God has finished with all this, it will pass away – "heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Mark 13:31. See also 2 Peter 3:10-13).

2. Heaven

Heaven is the supreme spiritual realm, where God dwells and where God's throne is. We normally think of Heaven as "up there" beyond the heavens, and this is borne out by what we read in Acts 7:48-49, 55-56 where Stephen said, "The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.'" Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" Thus the heavens (plural) were opened and God allowed Stephen the privilege of looking beyond the heavens into Heaven itself, where he saw the glory of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself described Heaven (singular) as the throne of God (Matthew 5:34; 23:22). The Lord's prayer says, "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" (that is, perfectly). Jesus also speaks of the angels in Heaven (Mark 13:32).

Jesus both came down from Heaven (John 3:13) and ascended into Heaven (Acts 3:21).

3. Heavenly places

The heavenlies or heavenly places refer to the spiritual realm where angelic beings (both good and bad) dwell. Satan, the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) and the "ruler of this world" (John 16:11), was cast out of Heaven, down to the earth, because of his spiritual pride and rebellion; he, together with the other fallen angels, dwell in the heavenly places. The heavenly places thus include the demonic realm over the earth's systems and people; they include the kingdom of darkness.

But the heavenly places also include God's holy angels and the angelic realm in the good sense. Spiritual battles are fought in the heavenlies. There are no battles in Heaven, for that is where God dwells. There are battles on earth, but they are physical battles (though demonically inspired). Spiritual warfare involves battles in the heavenlies between God's forces for good and the devil's hosts of wickedness (see Daniel 10:11-12).

In Ephesians we read several times of these heavenly places:

- God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1:3)

- Christ rules in the heavenly places (1:20-21)
- God has raised us up with Christ and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places (2:6). We thus have spiritual rule and authority, in Christ Jesus, over the evil spiritual powers in the heavenlies.
- The wisdom of God will be demonstrated to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, through the Church (3:10).
- We wrestle against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (6:12).

The reason for going into all this detail is to show clearly the difference between Heaven, where God dwells; the heavens which we can see with our physical eyes; and the 'heavenly places' which are the spiritual realms where spiritual battles are fought between the principalities and powers (angelic hosts), both good and evil. Praise God He rules over them all!

Seated with Christ (Ephesians 1:3, 20-23; 2:4-6)

God has blessed us, in Christ, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. God the Father raised Christ from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule (principality) and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named. He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the Head over all things for the Church. God, Who is rich in mercy, raised us up with Christ and made **us** sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

What does this mean? Simply, that in Christ we believers have the spiritual power and authority to rule in the heavenly places over the powers of darkness. By spiritual warfare through intercession, we can rule and reign with Christ over the enemy, and see God's purposes worked out here on earth as God desires. "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven".

We need to know the authority we have in Christ, and exercise **it!** Too often we pray timid little prayers, and when Satan roars or resists we give up and run in the opposite direction! We need know that **in Christ** we have the victory. The enemy has been stripped of his power and authority.

Satan, a defeated foe

"You, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this He set aside, nailing it to the Cross. Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers, and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the Cross" (Colossians 2:13-15).

Since this is so, how is it that the devil seems to be so powerful and have so much authority? The answer lies in the fact that the devil is a liar, a deceiver and a usurper. He will try to deceive us into believing that he has power over us; he will try to usurp authority which is not rightfully his. He will take everything we allow him to take; but when we stand our ground, which has been won for us by Christ, he can go no further. As an example: If I allow it, a person can come in my gate, onto my property, walk in the front door of my home, make themselves a cup of coffee, put their feet up in my lounge and generally "make themselves at home" in my home. But if I order a person off my property then I have the authority to have them forcibly removed if they refuse to go. I have the power of the police force behind me, and the authority of the law, to remove trespassers off my property. It all depends on what I allow!

Similarly, Satan will take everything we allow him to take, and he will use lies, deception, fear,

apathy, unbelief and so on, in order to do so; but he can go no further than we allow, for he has no legal authority over what is ours, and he has been stripped of his power. He rules by deception and by usurping the authority people give him. Therefore take your stand against him and be victorious! (Ephesians 6:10-13).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between Heaven, the heavens, and heavenly places?
2. Where are spiritual battles between good and evil fought?
3. What does it mean to say that we are "seated with Christ in heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6)? What practical applications does this have?
4. If Satan is a defeated enemy, why does he seem to be so powerful?
5. What is the source of our spiritual power and authority?
6. How do we "stand our ground" against the enemy?

5. OUR GOD-GIVEN POWER AND AUTHORITY

Often we use the words power and authority interchangeably, but there is actually an important difference between the two.

Authority is the right (or permission) to do something. Power is the ability to do it. It is possible to have the authority but not the ability, or to have the power but not the authority; for example, if a car comes to a red traffic light it does not have the authority to proceed. It may have plenty of power in the engine, but it does not have the authority to go. If the lights change to green but it runs of petrol, it now has the authority to go but not the power!

So we need both power and authority. However, it is important to remember that authority is always given within the limits which God specifies. Job's temptation and testing by Satan is a good example of this (Job chapters 1,2). God set the limits to which Satan could test Job. No-one has the authority to contradict what God has told us to do. Thus, when the disciples were forbidden to preach the Gospel they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard ... We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:13-21; 5:27-32). The disciples were not being rebellious; they recognised the supreme authority of God, and that no man had the right to prohibit what God had commanded. When laws are contrary to God's laws, and when people go beyond their God-given limits of authority, then we must obey God rather than men. But conversely we must be careful that we are not presumptuous and misuse (or try to misuse) the power and authority God has given us.

Power

Jesus said to His disciples, "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you, but stay in the city (Jerusalem) until you are clothed with power from on High ... You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses ... to end of the earth" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

Jesus thus indicated that divine power was given through the Holy Spirit coming upon His followers, and hence the important need for all Christians to "be continually filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

Authority

Jesus also said to His disciples, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus here indicated that divine authority rested in and with Him, so that in order for us to exercise divine authority we must stay close to Him and be obedient to His Word and His words.

The Source of our authority is Christ. The power of God is exercised through the Holy Spirit.

Power and authority in action

"Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal" (Luke 9:1-2). On a later occasion He appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of Him, two by two, into every town and place where Himself was about to come (Luke 10:1). They went out preaching the Gospel, healing the sick, and delivering the demon-possessed. "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your Name!' Jesus said to them 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven. [This is either a reference to when Satan

rebelled against God and was cast out of Heaven down to earth, or to Jesus seeing the spiritual defeat of Satan as His followers went out in His name and exercised their God-given power and authority]. Behold, I give you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven" (Luke 10:17- 20).

It is thrilling to see the powers of darkness bow to the name of Jesus – to see prayers answered, evils conquered, the bound set free, and so on. But exciting though that is, we must keep it in perspective: to see evil conquered is good, but far greater is the fact that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Satan's days are numbered — the pit of Hell is reserved for him and his angels, and one day he will be cast, bound, into it. (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). This will be Satan's ultimate destiny and his ultimate defeat. This is why we should have no fear, for we are on the side which will win! In Christ our ultimate victory is sure and secure! "Fear not!" — rather, rejoice! The enemy's days are numbered and his remaining time on earth is short. Let us endure to the end and so receive the crown of life which the Lord will give to all overcomers (Revelation 2:10).

So what Jesus is saying in Luke 10:20 is that we must keep a sense of balance and priority, and not become too preoccupied with the devil. What is of **eternal** importance is that people are saved and that their names are written in Heaven. Binding the powers of darkness and setting people free is part of the Gospel and part of evangelism (Luke 4:18-19) but the angels of Heaven rejoice when sinners are saved (Luke 15:10).

Greater works

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you: he who believes in Me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My Name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14). Jesus' public ministry here on earth was probably limited to about 3½ years. He was one Man who ministered intensively for that short time. But He sent forth the 12 disciples, then the 70, then the 120 which rapidly grew to 3000, 5000, ... and today there are multiplied millions of Christians all around the world, praying in His Name, and seeing miracles daily.

Jesus said to them on another occasion, "As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." When He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21-22). So, from the Day of Pentecost, the early followers of Jesus went out full of the Holy Spirit, with divine power and authority, and in the name of Jesus they performed signs and wonders: the sick were healed, the dead were raised, the demon-possessed were delivered, miracles occurred, but — greatest of all — the Gospel was preached and multitudes were saved, as "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). In fact, read the whole book of Acts to see the thrilling story of what men and women, full of the Holy Spirit, with divine power and authority, accomplished in the Lord's Name!

The key to being victorious is to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit, and to know and exercise your God-given power and authority in Jesus' Name.

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8b). May we continue this task, in Jesus' Name!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between power and authority? How does power and authority in the Christian sense differ from worldly power and authority?

2. "Authority is always given within the limits specified by God". Discuss the importance of this fact.
3. What are some of the presumptuous ways in which people sometimes try to misuse God-given power and authority?
4. What is the source of our power and authority as Christians?
5. Why do you think Jesus said what He did in Luke 10:20?
6. How can we do "greater works" than Jesus did? (John 14:12).

6. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

Read Ephesians 6:10-20

God has not left us defenceless against the attacks of the enemy; indeed, He has provided us with all we need for the conflict, in order that we might both battle and win!

The armour is described as the "armour of God" for, while there may be many ways in which we might seek to conquer the enemy in the flesh, only with God's weapons and God's armour will we be successful. The arm of flesh will fail us, but God's arm and His armour will guarantee us victory (Psalm 44:3). Remember David and Goliath – Goliath came out to battle against David with a sword, a spear and a javelin; David came in the Name of the Lord of Hosts — and we know who won! (1 Samuel 17:45).

One of the things that spiritual warfare shows us is our need to depend entirely on God. We will face situations that we cannot handle by ourselves — and this is good! We will find ourselves cast on God. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of *His* might". Our independence may cost us many defeats, but when we lean entirely on Him we will find that He is faithful.

Moreover, we are told to put on the whole armour of God. Most Christians are strong in some areas of their lives but weak in others. You can be sure that the enemy will attack in the areas of our weakness, rather than in the areas where we are strong! This is why we must make sure that every piece of armour is put on, not just some of the armour. Again, remember that it was the one spot where Goliath was not protected (his forehead) where he was defeated (1 Samuel 17:49). We need to make sure we do not have any unprotected areas in our lives. "Put on the *whole* armour".

It is worth noting that there is no armour for the back — we are not intended to run away from the enemy; rather we are called to stand against him!

The devil is cunning, subtle and clever — but he cannot outsmart the alert, protected soldier of Christ. We need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. We need to "watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41). We need to know God's Word. We need to know and discern the ways of the enemy. Then we can be sure of victory.

In some ways it would be easier if we were fighting against flesh and blood, but we are not! We must use spiritual weapons, for spiritual warfare, and fight in the spiritual realm. There are **spiritual hosts of wickedness seeking to destroy God's creation**, God's people, God's Kingdom and God's plans. But "Fear not!" — God is with us; He is our leader, our King, our Conqueror! Hallelujah! He has promised, "I will never fail you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

We are not standing alone; God is with us, and so is His heavenly host and also our Christian brothers and sisters. Sometimes, like Elijah, we may feel that "I, I alone, am left", but God knows the thousands of others that are also faithful and have not bowed their knee to Baal (Romans 11:2-5). Perhaps you feel alone in the battle? Be encouraged — there is a host of others with you! "Having done all — stand!"

The seven pieces of God's armour

1. Truth

It is extremely important that as we pray, teach and preach, that we know the truth and preach it. Ultimately, all things need to be tested by the eternal Word of God. If they agree with the

Bible they are true; if they are in conflict with the Bible they are false. Some things may appear to be neither strongly supported nor denied by the Bible, in which case they may be true but they should be held lightly and we must be open to the fact that other Christians may not agree with them.

Jesus prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). How we need to know God's Word of truth!

2. Righteousness

Our lives need to be right with God and right with other people. Nothing will destroy our testimony, or the power of our prayers, more than hypocrisy. Our lives must match the words we preach and the prayers we pray. We need to pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). The only way our "lights" will shine clearly and brightly, bringing glory to our Heavenly Father, is if we are living righteous lives before both God and man (Matthew 5:14-16). If not, the devil will condemn us, and others will pour scorn on our testimony. Let us always seek to live with clean hands and a pure heart.

3. The Gospel of Peace

At the centre of the Gospel is the message of reconciliation — people reconciled to God, and also reconciled to others. The Gospel is the Good News of Peace. **But** people will never be at peace until they are really first at peace with God. It is futile to preach "Peace on earth" until we have first come to peace with God. Our old natures will always be at war, but when we have died to the old nature and put on Christ, **then** we can have peace.

The world cries out for peace but finds no peace, because it does not know that the Prince of Peace has come and will give peace if we repent of our evil ways and receive Him. We must preach **this** Gospel of peace and live it out in our daily lives!

4. Faith

We are surrounded by pessimistic, depressed, discouraged, unbelieving people. In the midst of this the Christian is called to live by faith in God. Over and over again the Bible says, "Fear not!" Hope in God! Exercise the faith God has given you. God is in control! As Christians we are called day by day to "live by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20). Moreover, there is also a supernatural gift of faith for which we can pray (1 Corinthians 12:9).

How we Christians need to live above the plane of the world and demonstrate that with faith all things are possible! And closely linked to faith is hope: if we have faith in Christ then we will have hope — both now and for the future.

5. Salvation

Jesus Christ came to bring us salvation — salvation from eternal death, from separation from God, from all that is evil. He came to save us, body, soul and spirit. He came to set us free from sin, condemnation, sickness, bondage. He came to make us whole in every area of our beings. What a great salvation!

How we need to meditate upon, and deeply appreciate all that God, in Christ, has done for us. Then we need to go out and declare it! Christians must not selfishly hold to themselves the good things of God, for Christ died for all so that all could enter His salvation.

The Gospel is exclusive in the sense that no-one can come to God except through Jesus Christ; it is all-inclusive in the sense that everyone can come to God through Christ! Hallelujah! Christ is "the Way, the Truth and the Life"; no-one comes to the Father except by Him (John 14:6). In Him there is salvation; outside of Him there is no salvation. "There is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under Heaven, given among men, by which we must

be saved" (Acts 4:12).

6. The Word of God

So far we have looked at the five pieces of armour that protect us, defensively. We now turn to the two offensive weapons that God has given us, with which to come against the enemy.

The Word of God referred to here is the **rhema** — the inspired, quickened, anointed Word which God gives us. We need to know God's Word (the Bible) and then, as God leads us, use the inspired Word as a sword. Rightly used, divinely inspired, God's Word is very powerful (Hebrews 4:12-13).

7. Prayer in the Spirit

Prayer in the Spirit is the other weapon God has given us. It is not likened to any earthly weapon, for it has no earthly counterpart. Like the Word (*rhema*) of God, it is divinely inspired, authoritative prayer that is fervent, effective, having great power. In some ways it is not easy to "pray at all times in the spirit" — it requires wisdom, sensitivity to God, discernment, an abandonment of one's own fleshly ideas and desires, but for the skilled soldier it is an indispensable weapon.

These, then, are the seven pieces of armour and weapons with which God has supplied us. We will be successful in spiritual warfare to the extent to which we use these weapons and put on the whole armour of God.

QUESTIONS

1. How does a person "put on" the armour of God?
2. What are some of the "fleshly" ways in which we sometimes try to tackle the enemy?
3. What are the significances of:
 - being told to put on the "whole" armour of God?
 - there not being any armour for our backs?
4. What should we do if we feel very much alone in spiritual battles?
5. Why is ...
 - Truth likened to a girdle?
 - Righteousness likened to a breastplate?
 - The Gospel likened to shoes?
 - Faith likened to a shield?
 - Salvation likened to a helmet?
 - The Word of God likened to a sword?
6. Is there an earthly parallel to "praying in the Spirit"? If so, what is it?

7. THE NAME, THE BLOOD, THE WORD, THE CROSS

In the last study we looked at the armour of God. Besides those weapons and pieces of armour listed in Ephesians 6:10-18, God has also made other provisions for our divine protection. Some of these are: the Name of the Lord, the Blood of the Lamb, the Word of God, and the Cross of Christ.

The Name of the Lord

"The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10)

There is great power in the **Name of the Lord**; not the Lord's Name used in a superstitious or magical way, but when we exercise faith in Who the Lord is and what His Name means.

God says that "all who call upon the Name of the Lord shall be delivered (or saved)" (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). As we confess with our lips that "Jesus is Lord" — as we take His Name upon ourselves and into our lives — and as we believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, so we are saved (Romans 10:9-13).

Likewise, our deliverance from the hand of the enemy comes by calling on the Name of the Lord, for His protection, His deliverance, His victory.

Jesus told us to pray "in His Name", for it is only through Him that we have access to the Father. Again, His Name is not a magical symbol or password; it is through His atoning work on the Cross that we, who have faith in Him, have access to the Father, in His Name (John 14:6, 13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24).

The Blood of the Lamb

John the Baptist introduced the Messiah with the words, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the sacrificial Lamb Who died and Whose infinitely precious Blood was shed so that we could be cleansed from all sin and thereby be reconciled to the Father.

- It is through the Blood that we are cleansed from sin (1 John 1:7-9).
- It is through the Blood that we are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:19-20).
- It is by His stripes that we are healed and made whole (Isaiah 53:3-6). The words "sorrows" and "griefs" also mean "sicknesses" and "pains". See also Matthew 8:16-17; 1 Peter 2:24).
- It is through the Blood that we conquer Satan: "They have conquered him [Satan, the devil] by the Blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Revelation 12:11).

The blood of the Passover lamb was also for protection. When God saw the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites, the angel of death passed over them and they were kept from the dreadful fate that the Egyptians suffered. "The blood shall be a sign for you ... When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt" (Exodus 12:1-13). Hence the concept of being "covered (protected) by the Blood" of the Lamb of God. The enemy cannot touch those whose lives are washed in the Blood and are covered by that Blood.

The Word of God

"The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit ... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Before Him

no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

One of the reasons there have been so many strong attacks upon God's Word, the Bible, is that it is one of the most powerful weapons God has given us. The Bible has been derided, mocked, denied, twisted, burned and abused in countless ways over the centuries, but it still stands as the living, active Word of God – totally reliable and trustworthy for every believer, in every age, and every culture or land. The physical heavens and earth will one day pass away, but God's Word will stand forever (Mark 13:31).

No Christian can ever be complete as a soldier of Christ without a thorough knowledge of God's Word and how to use it. Jesus disarmed Satan by the right use of the Word – "It is written" (Matthew 4:1-11).

It is the Word of God which has "divine power to destroy [Satanic] strongholds — to destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

But we must know God's Word, believe God's Word, meditate on God's Word, use God's Word, obey God's Word, and confess God's Word if we are to be successful (Joshua 1:8-9; Psalm 1:2-3).

God's Word contains many exceedingly great and precious promises that will encourage us and sustain us through difficult times (2 Peter 1:3-4). The Word of God contains the wisdom of God and provides the Christian with divine direction and guidance (Psalm 119:105). Let us stand on the promises of God by putting our faith in Him and by being obedient to His Word. Let us know the Truth, and declare it! The Word of God is not like a weak kitten that we need to protect; it is like a lion — let it loose and it will defend itself!

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the child of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Let us never underestimate the power of God's Word!

The Cross of Christ

The Cross of Christ is the central focal point of the whole of human history. We, as Christians, cannot conceive what it would have been like to have lived before the Cross. For us "It is finished!" The great redeeming, reconciling work of the Cross is past — and we live in the blessing of that incredible event.

"You who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this He set aside, nailing it to the Cross. Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers, and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the Cross" (Colossians 2:13-15).

Jesus' death and resurrection spelled defeat for the enemy. Sins were cleansed, bondages broken, sicknesses healed, the broken made whole, rebellious sinners were reconciled to God — through the Cross. No wonder Paul said, "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

The Cross of Christ is the point of unity of all true Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, black or white: "He is our peace, Who has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... that He might create in Himself one new man in the place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one Body through the Cross, thereby bringing

the hostility to an end" (Ephesians 2:14-16). How shameful it is, then, when Christians are divided one from the other; it is a reproach to the Cross, which has broken down all barriers between us.

"The word of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Friends, God has provided us with powerful weapons. He has provided us with all we need, not only to survive battles, but to be victorious! Let us never forget, let us never underestimate or neglect to use, the Name of the Lord, the Blood of the Lamb, the Word of God and the Cross of Christ — these are precious gifts which only those who know Christ have received and can use. Make much of them!

QUESTIONS

1. We need to be careful how we use the Name of the Lord. What are some wrong ways in which God's Name is used? How should we use His Name?
2. How can the Lord's Name save and protect us?
3. What does it mean to be "covered by the Blood"?
4. Why is it so important that every Christian gets to know God's Word and obey it?
5. Why is disunity between true Christians a reproach to the Cross?
6. How can we "glory in the Cross"? (Galatians 6:14).

8. THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

The ministry of angels is something that is rarely spoken about today, and yet the Hebrew word *malak* (meaning 'angel' or 'messenger' or 'ambassador') is translated "angel" 113 times in the Old Testament, and the Greek word *angelos* (meaning 'angel' or 'messenger' or 'agent') is translated "angel" 181 times in the New Testament. So there is plenty of Biblical evidence for the existence of angels!

While all the angels were originally created by God as perfect spiritual beings, the Bible indicates that Lucifer (Satan) led a rebellion against God and he, together with a third of the angels, was cast down to the earth (see Revelation 12:1-12 where stars are symbolic of angels — compare with Revelation 1:20; Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekeiel 28:12-17).

Thus, not all angels are good angels. "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14. His original name, Lucifer, means "shining one"). In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul refers to "a messenger (*angelos*) of Satan" — that is, a satanic angel.

We do well to realize that not all angels are of God. While spiritists and mediums claim to contact only "good spirits", by their fruit we may know that they are really demons in disguise. However, the purpose of this study is not to look at Satan's fallen angels, but to look at the ministry of God's holy angels, as they minister on His behalf to the saints. God's angels are His messengers or agents, His servants.

Psalm 34:7 "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them". One aspect of the angels' ministry is to protect those who love and serve the Lord.

Psalm 91:11-12 "He will give His angels charge over you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone". Satan quoted these verses to Jesus when he tempted Him to do something foolish, but Jesus knew it was wrong to tempt God by being foolish and reckless, and then expect God to save us out of trouble (Matthew 4:5-7). God's promised protection should in no way encourage us to be foolish or careless!

Daniel 10:12-21 God's angels may be sent in response to our intercessions. In this case, Daniel had been fasting and praying for three weeks for the release of Israel from captivity. Demonic principalities and powers had sought to oppose his prayers, but God sent His angel Michael to fight on Daniel's behalf, so that his prayers were answered. There was spiritual warfare in heavenly places, but Daniel (and Michael) won through, and Israel was released from captivity to go back to their land. (Michael is one of the two angels mentioned by name in Scripture; the other is Gabriel. The name Michael means "who is like God"; Gabriel means "God is mighty").

Matthew 4:11 "Then the devil left Him (Jesus), and behold, angels came and ministered to Him". God allows us to be tempted and tested. Sometimes, like Jesus and Paul, there are direct confrontations with Satan or Satan's angels. *We need not fear this, for God is still with us and will bring us through these times.* When the battle was over, angels came and ministered to Jesus — we are not told how, but how refreshing that must have been after a 40-day trial!

Luke 22:43 In the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus agonized over the Cross, "there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven, strengthening Him". Again, at the hour of His greatest need, the Father sent an angel to strengthen His Son.

Hebrews 1:13-14 Referring to God's angels, the writer to the Hebrews says, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" Not only was Jesus served, strengthened, and ministered to by angels, but so are all of us who are saved!

In referring to children, Jesus said, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in Heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father Who is in Heaven"

(Matthew 18:10).

The Jews believed, based on Psalm 91:11, that each person has two "guardian angels" watching over them constantly.

Angels in the life of the Church

Angels are frequently mentioned in the Gospels (48 times, in fact) and were associated with the earthly life of Christ on most of those occasions. But since the ascension of Christ and the establishment of the Church on earth, are angels still associated with the Church, ministering to Christians? Yes! Let us look at some examples in Acts:

5:17-21 When the apostles were imprisoned for preaching Christ and healing the sick, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and set them free.

8:26 It was an angel of the Lord that told Philip to go down the road to Gaza, and it was there that he led the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord Jesus.

10:3, 7, 22; 11:13 An angel spoke to Cornelius and directed him to Peter, who brought him to Christ and thus brought the Gospel to the Gentiles.

12:6-17 An angel of the Lord released Peter from prison. Strangely enough, those who were praying for his release did not believe it when Rhoda told them he was at the door. They could believe it was his angel, but not Peter himself!

12:21-23 When Herod accepted the worship and praise of men, and did not give glory to God, an angel of the Lord smote him and he died. God's angels may warn and bring judgement, as well as protect, guide and bring an encouraging message from the Lord!

27:21-26 During a storm, when Paul was on a ship that was about to be shipwrecked, an angel of God appeared to him, encouraging him, and showing him what to do and say so that lives would not be lost, even though the ship itself was wrecked.

So we have a number of illustrations of the truth of God's promises: "He will give His angels charge of you, to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11) and "Are they [the angels of God] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to serve ... those who are to obtain salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). Hebrews 13:1-2 says that in exercising brotherly love and in extending hospitality to strangers, some people have thereby entertained angels unawares (cf. Genesis 18:1-8 and 19:1-3).

God's representatives

The angels of God are His representatives, His messengers or ambassadors, so we find in Scripture that what angels say or do is sometimes stated to be what God said or did, for example, "An angel of the Lord" brought Peter out of prison, but Peter told his friends "how the Lord had brought him out of prison" (Acts 12:7-10, 17). Likewise, the Book of Revelation opens with the words, "The revelation of Jesus Christ which ... He made known by sending His angel to His servant John" (1:1).

This is most important, because we do not look to angels, we look to God. God may choose to answer our prayers or send us help by means of His angels (messengers), but it is God's choice and to His praise and glory. We are not to worship angels — they are part of God's creation, just as we are (see Colossians 2:18-19; Revelation 19:9-10; 22:8-9 "Worship God!").

So we don't pray to angels, worship angels, or even look to angels, but God may direct His holy angels to protect, guide, encourage or help us as we seek to serve Him.

In the next study we will look at the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. Do angels still serve Christians today? If so, can you give any examples of this?
2. Who do you think were "the angels of the seven churches" (Revelation 1:20; 2:1, etc)?

3. Why and when does God send angels instead of doing or saying something directly, Himself?
4. How can we distinguish between God's holy angels and the fallen angels who follow Satan? (See 2 Corinthians 11:14-15).
5. Why were angels often confused with people, when they appeared to people in Biblical times?
6. Why did some people bow down to, and worship, angels? (Colossians 2:18)

9. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The scientific and materialistic age in which we live has caused people to become very independent of God. Especially in developed countries where we can rely on hospitals, insurance, education, wealth, and so on, there seems to be little need for God. We have forgotten the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit", says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6).

We need to remember that every breath of air we breathe, every heartbeat, every mouthful of food, is there by the grace of God. Without God we are DEAD.

In an age of great activity, Christians need to know again, and rely entirely on, not their own intelligence and abilities, but on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Why do many Christians spend so little time in prayer? To be honest: because they think they can do it alone; prayer is not all that necessary — or so we feel!

This could not be further from the truth. One of the main reasons we see so much Christian activity with so little lasting fruit is because we are not utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit. We talk about power and authority, but we do not see great evidence of it in practice!

Not only do we need to cast ourselves in utter dependence upon God, to seek His face in prayer, but the Bible even tells us that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not [even] know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words; and He Who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

It is only being inspired by the Holy Spirit, that the effective prayers of a righteous man are strong and powerful (James 5:16). Where are our strong, powerful, effective prayers?

The Executive Agent of God

In Scripture the Holy Spirit is portrayed as the "Executive Agent" of God — God at work in our world. Whereas God the Father is often seen as the Sovereign Lord, seated on the Throne of Heaven, the Holy Spirit is always active.

In Luke 4:16-21 we read that Jesus read a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 and applied it to Himself. Certainly this passage had prophetic, Messianic significance, but surely it should also be true of all Spirit-filled Christians (it certainly was in the early Church!): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord".

If we, as Christians, are to be effective in our lives and ministries, then we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, equipped with the gifts of the Spirit, exercising divine power and authority as God gives it. Some churches have actually advertised themselves as "non-charismatic" — how tragic: a church without gifts! Lest we fall into the danger of trying to do God's work in the flesh, we desperately need to know the inspiration and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

If I, by my strength and effort and wisdom, do not need to rely on God, in order for me to do His work, then I get the praise and glory, not God. God forbid that this should be so! Yet how dependent are we really on the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Why don't we see more of God's power and authority? There are several reasons why:

Lack of holiness in our lives. God cannot fully commit Himself, His power and authority to

those who are not living God-glorifying lives.

Lack of faith. Tragically, some Christians deny the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church today. It is far easier not to believe than to believe!

Lack of commitment. There is much superficiality in the Church today. We do not persist and persevere; we do not press on in faith and in prayer until we see God move in miraculous power. Too few Christians really know what it means — in practice — to wait on God.

Worldliness. We are in the world, and often the world, to a large extent, is still in us. This should not be so!

Compromise. We have compromised our lives, our faith, and our commitment, and so we only see a partial display of the glory, majesty and power of God. The Lord says, "Seek Me with your whole heart, and I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:11-14a).

Lack of dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is probably fairly true to say that if the Holy Spirit should withdraw from the Church today, most of our church activities would continue as normal. Friends, the Church should utterly collapse without the ministry of the Holy Spirit — it should not be propped up and kept going by the flesh! How dependent are we really on the Holy Spirit?

Divine inspiration

The Bible says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally, Every Scripture is God-breathed], and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, in order that the man of God may be fitted and furnished for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Scriptures, the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), is God-breathed; it was given by divine inspiration. Sadly, much preaching of the Word today lacks that inspiration. How we need to pray for anointed, divinely-inspired preaching of the life-giving Word of God. If the preached Word seems dry, it is no reflection on the Word — it is a reflection either on the preacher or his hearers (or both!) The Word of God is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

We need revelation from the Holy Spirit. We need to know His ministry as the Encourager, the Comforter, the Counsellor. We need divine enthusiasm. [The word "enthusiastic" comes from the Greek *en Theos* — full of God]. Oh! for a Church full of enthusiastic Christians — full of the Holy Spirit, full of God, Christlike in every way! Let us not allow *what is*, to dim the vision of *what should be!*

We should "walk by the Spirit" and "live by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16,25). We are commanded to take the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) and pray at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20). This is the normal Christian life! How far short we fall of it, simply because we do not live in total dependence upon the ministry of the Spirit in our lives. What a different world this would be; how different our churches would be, if we lived as God intended:

- filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)
- exercising the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)
- using the power and authority God has given to the Church (Acts 1:8; Luke 9:1-2)
- producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- praying at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18)
- preaching and teaching the Word of God, and witnessing, under divine anointing and inspiration.

Is this possible?

Praise God, it is! The Book of Acts shows us that, while the early Church was not perfect, it knew a much greater measure of the power of God than we have seen today.

Just because we have not known these things in our own personal experience, this should not

hinder us from seeking God and earnestly praying for a much greater release of His Spirit and power in our own lives and in our churches. As God moves in power, so He will be glorified here on earth. We do not seek power for power's sake, or for our own glory, but that the earth may know that there is a God in Heaven and that nothing is too hard for our God. (See Acts 5:12-16).

"Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. These signs will follow those who believe – in My Name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them. They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.' So the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen!" (Mark 16:15-20).
May it be so again today!

QUESTIONS

1. Why do so many Christians live their lives with very little dependence on God?
2. Why don't we see much greater evidence of God's power and authority in the Church today? (John 14:12-14).
3. How dependent am I, and how dependent is my church, on the Holy Spirit?
4. To what extent has intellectualism replaced the anointed, inspired preaching of God's Word today?
5. The Church today in many ways is not the same as it was in the New Testament. What are some of the ways in which we need to return to New Testament Christianity?
6. Jesus said "These signs will follow ..." Who? What were these signs? (Mark 16:17-18).

10. BINDING THE STRONG MAN

Jesus said, "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house" (see Matthew 12:22-32; Mark 3:20-30).

One aspect of spiritual warfare is that of binding the strong man in a person's life, or over a city or nation, in order that the person, city or nation might be set free from demonic domination by that strong man. When we sin — particularly if that sin is persistent and not repented of — we give the enemy entrance into our lives. An evil "strong man" can take over certain areas of our lives so that we cannot control ourselves in those areas; rather, we are controlled by the strong man over those areas. This applies both individually and, if it is widespread over an area or nation, that area or nation can come under the control of a demonic strong man.

But, praise God, we can be set free! The strong man can be bound, and his house and goods plundered. That which is only rightfully his because of sin can be redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb and set free by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hallelujah!

Binding and loosing

Jesus said, "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in Heaven. ... If two of you agree [or, are led in harmony] on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father Who is in Heaven" (see Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18-20 NAS). We have the authority, as led by the Holy Spirit, to bind the powers of darkness and loose those people who have been bound by them. Jesus came "to proclaim release to the captives ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed (or bound)." (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1-2). And "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed!" (John 8:31-36). This ministry of binding and loosing, Jesus has imparted to the Church, through His Spirit (John 20:21-23).

Setting individuals free

If a person will come to the Lord, repent of their sins and confess them to the Lord, renounce the devil and all his evil works, then he can be set free from all demonic bondages. Once the sin problem has been dealt with (for this gives entrance to the enemy) and the devil's authority over the person's life has been renounced, the enemy has no grounds for continuing to control that person's life; in Jesus' Name the strong man can be bound, and the person can be delivered and set free.

The key is the willingness of the person to repent, confess, renounce the devil, and be set free. It is also best if things are confessed and renounced by name, rather than in general terms.

It is also important that once the devil has been bound and cast out, the person be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came', and when he comes, he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there. So the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (Matthew 12:43-45) An empty — albeit clean — house is an open invitation for anything to come in; we need to make sure we are "constantly filled with the Holy Spirit"! (Ephesians 5:18).

Binding the strong man over a city or nation

Just as individuals, through sin, give openings to evil spirits, so towns, cities and nations can be dominated by evil principalities and powers that manifest themselves in strong, dominating, evil influences over the area. Because of the much greater prevalence of sin and unrepentant

sinners in the area, the spiritual battle against these powers is all the greater.

As Christians pray and discern the spirits over the city or nation, the Lord may reveal how they should be dealt with. It may involve confession of the sins of the Church and nation; it will involve the renunciation of those powers of darkness. The strong man needs to be bound and the place set free from the powers of darkness. This will involve persistent, united spiritual warfare by leaders and representatives of the area being prayed over. Individuals, by themselves, are not in a position or authority to tackle powers over cities or nations: representatives need to be led in harmony by the Holy Spirit to intercede in this way (Matthew 18:19). Rarely, if ever, will major rulers of darkness be bound by one person in one prayer meeting. The battle will usually be long (cf. Daniel's intercession and fasting for three weeks — Daniel 10). Don't rush into binding the enemy; there needs to be a united witness as to how and when to take such a stand and decree the binding of the strong man in a given area!

The larger the area (nation or world region), the stronger the evil principality and the more representative, mature and experienced the intercessors need to be. Too many people, full of enthusiasm but lacking in experience and maturity, have tried to tackle the enemy by themselves and "bind Satan over an area". While not fearing the enemy, neither should we underestimate him, nor the authority that Satan, the prince of the demonic realm.

To summarize...

If individuals will renounce the enemy's influence in their lives, we can pray with them and see them set free.

When praying for cities and nations we must not be presumptuous or hasty. In a city, the Church needs to come together to pray — or at least church leaders and representatives who will intercede for their city. We need to be led by the Holy Spirit, and identify and bind the strong man. We need to persist (and this may take months or years) until we have the witness that the powers of darkness are bound or we see a change in that area. This warfare is not for individuals on their own, for this will involve a much greater battle and an army is required, not just a lone soldier! The same is true, on an even greater scale, when praying for nations — spiritual leaders and representatives from around the nation need to gather together to pray and wage warfare — and not just once, but until victory is secured! The devil does not easily let go of individuals, let alone cities and nations! Nevertheless, "He Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

The powers of darkness over a community or over a city are much stronger because there may be hundreds or thousands of people who are not Christians and who do not want to be set free from their evil deeds. Intercession, fasting and spiritual warfare may therefore go on for years over a particular situation until we see the answer, or else until the Lord leads us to cease praying, at least for a time, over that situation.

The word of knowledge, discernment of spirits, divine revelation and leading should play a very important part in intercessory prayer. Unfortunately these gifts are not commonly used except in praying for individuals; this is an area that really needs to be expanded when praying for revival in whole communities, and, indeed for the nation as a whole.

"Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them *power* and *authority* over all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal" (Luke 9:1-2). Later, "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your Name'. Jesus said to them 'I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you.'" (Luke 10:17-19 NASB).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it not wise for individual Christians to tackle principalities and powers over a city or nation, by themselves?
2. How can we know when the strong man is bound?
3. What gives the enemy authority over our lives? How do we take this authority away from the enemy?
4. How can we identify the strong man over a city or nation?
5. Why are confession of sin and renunciation of the devil so important when binding the strong man?
6. How can Christians really influence the moral and spiritual climate of a city or nation?

11. REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

In the last study, on "Binding the Strong Man", we looked at how the powers of darkness could be bound and how a person, situation or area could be delivered and set free from the domination of Satan.

It is important, however, that we distinguish between the need to be delivered from the powers of darkness (satanic bondage), and the need to recognise sin, repent of it and confess it to the Lord. While temptation and sin originated in Satan, we cannot blame our sins on him and therefore think we are excused! Adam and Eve tried to do this: Satan tempted Eve, who in turn tempted Adam; both Adam and Eve willfully did what they knew God had said was wrong; then Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed Satan! God punished each one for their own sin (Genesis 3).

We need to recognise sin for what it is — deliberate, willful, disobedience to God; rebellion! There is no excuse for sin. It is no use blaming others or saying, "The devil made me do it". The *only* way to forgiveness is to repent and ask God's forgiveness. This applies both individually and corporately. We need to repent of our own sins as individuals; and leaders or representatives of churches or nations need to repent on behalf of their people. We cannot blame our sins on the powers of darkness, demons or Satanic bondages: what we have done, we must confess! Deliverance is no substitute for repentance and confession. John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples all preached repentance (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30, etc.).

Sin, particularly persistent sin, gives entrance to demonic powers, and certainly we need to be set free, but we cannot blame our sin on the bondage. We need both the forgiveness which comes through repentance and confession, and the deliverance which comes through renouncing the enemy, binding the strong man and being set free (John 8:31-36; 2 Peter 2:18-19).

National repentance

In praying for our nation to be set free from the powers of darkness we need to recognise the place of public repentance and confession for the sins of the Church and nation. As Christian leaders, we particularly need to confess the sins of the Church, for unless there is true repentance in the Church, what hope is there for the nation? (See 1 Peter 4:17-18).

Obviously the whole Church cannot meet together, neither can the whole nation — indeed, some in the Church and many in the nation may not even be repentant! But leaders and representatives of the Church and nation can gather together to confess the sins of the Church or nation, ask for God's forgiveness, and pray for a spirit of true repentance to come on the people.

Confessing the sins of the nation

God has set watchmen over nations (see Ezekiel 33:1-16). These are Christians who have both a prophetic and intercessory ministry, together with the gift of discernment and an understanding of the times in which they are living. They need to discern the hand of the enemy; they need to proclaim God's word into the situation, and warn the people. They need to be people of prayer, with a compassion for their people.

As far back as Leviticus 26, God laid down the principles by which he works. (This is also repeated in Deuteronomy 28). God said, in effect, "If a nation is obedient to Me, I will bless it. If a nation is disobedient, it will know My judgements upon it. If a nation repents and confesses its sins, I will be merciful and will forgive". While Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are

particularly addressed to the nation of Israel, they declare the principles on which God works. In Jeremiah 18:7-10, speaking of any nation or kingdom, God says, "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in My sight, not listening to My voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it".

Again, in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, God says, "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My Name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land".

Some examples of confessing the sins of a nation

MOSES: On a number of occasions Moses came to the Lord, confessing the sins of the children of Israel and pleading with the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness (see Exodus 32:9-14, 30-34; Numbers 14:11-20; 21:4-9; Deuteronomy 9:13-20, 22-29).

JUDGES: In the book of Judges we read that Israel, over and over again, forsook the Lord and served other gods. So the Lord allowed their enemies to oppress them until they cried out to the Lord, confessed their sin and, in repentance, turned back to God — at least for a time! (e.g, see Judges 10:6-16).

EZRA: The people of Israel intermarried with people from heathen nations and did not keep themselves pure before God. When Ezra heard of this he fasted and prayed, and confessed the sins of the people before God, pleading for His forgiveness (Ezra 9). Chapter 10 shows that by their actions the people too were truly repentant.

NEHEMIAH: Like Ezra, Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people and pleaded for God's mercy (Nehemiah 1). See also Ezra's prayer in Nehemiah 9 and the people's promise to follow God's ways in the future. (Nehemiah 10:28-39).

DANIEL: Daniel likewise fasted and prayed, and confessed the sins of his people when they were in captivity in Babylon, and God heard his prayer and delivered his people (Daniel 9:1-21).

NINEVEH: When God warned the people of Nineveh of their impending judgement because they were a wicked city (Jonah 1:2), the people fasted and repented and cried to God for mercy, and He spared them (Jonah 3).

A God of Mercy

The above examples, and many others, show us that God is a merciful God. The Lord hates to have to punish people, even as a good and loving father hates to have to punish his children — but sometimes it is necessary! What every good father longs for is his children's confession of their wrongdoing and their repentance. This is a reflection of God's longing to forgive and extend mercy. God has no pleasure in punishing people!

"If a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps My statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for by the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? ... Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the

transgressions which you have committed against Me and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God, so turn and live!" (Ezekiel 18:21-23, 30-32). "The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

God is a good, loving, merciful God — longing to forgive and extend mercy to repentant people.

Oh, that we might come to God with truly repentant hearts, confess our sins and the sins of our nation, and find God's mercy and forgiveness extended to us as He turns away His wrath and judgement, and instead, brings blessing to a repentant people! (Joel 2:12-14).

QUESTIONS

1. How can we distinguish between sin for which repentance is required, and a bondage for which deliverance is required?
2. "Repentance and deliverance work together, just as sin and bondage come together". Discuss.
3. How can we repent over the sins of our nation?
4. What is the ministry of a watchman?
5. What divine principles do we learn from Leviticus, chapter 26?
6. Look at the sequence of events in Judges 3:7-11 and discuss the causes and their effects.

12. THE PLACE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Of all the things we do for the Lord, surely praise and thanksgiving should be from the purest of motives: we praise God for Who He is; we thank Him for what He has done.

While it is true that in blessing God, we are often blessed ourselves, and while we may really enjoy praising and worshipping God, our motives for praise and thanksgiving should never be what we can get out of it; it should be a pure, unselfish, gift to God.

It is important to stress this, because in these days when so many Christians are looking all the time for God to bless them, one suspects that often people sing praises to God and worship Him because they feel good doing it; their motive is what they get out of it, not what God receives! (Of course, we are unlikely to admit this, but is not this often true?) How often we get thrilled and excited when we get a blessing out of a church service, but do we ever stop and ask, "Was God thrilled by it? What did He receive?" Surely our worship services should primarily be for Him, not for us!

Yet it is true that in blessing God from a pure heart, God does bless us too (though that should never be our motive). There is that which, in good music and worship, lifts the heart and spirit out of discouragement, depression and weariness, and raises us to new heights. We see this, for example, in David's playing of the harp to King Saul, whenever Saul was troubled (1 Samuel 16:14-23). Singing, music and worship are able to lift the depressed or weary soul, but primarily our worship and thanksgiving should be the spontaneous overflow of our love, gratitude and devotion to the Lord.

During times of intercession, and especially when we are engaged in spiritual warfare through intercession, there can come a heaviness and weariness — we become spiritually "battle-weary" and need to be lifted up again in God. Perhaps we have allowed our eyes to turn from God onto other things; perhaps there are doubts, or battles we feel are too strong for us, or too long in being won. We need to lift our eyes again to God (Psalm 121). We need to encourage ourselves in God; we need to think again of His goodness, His answers to our prayers. Our faith needs to be strengthened once more. In short, we need to return to praise and thanksgiving, singing and worship, for they are like food and drink to a weary soldier.

Psalm 42 illustrates this well. In the midst of the battle, when one is discouraged and even questioning where God really is in all this, the psalmist not only says, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you troubled within me?"; he also says, "Hope in God, so I shall again praise Him, my help and my God!"

So it is good for us to give thanks to the Lord (Psalm 92) and it is pleasing to God when we honour Him in this way. "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His Name! For the Lord is good" (Psalm 100:4-5).

Praise is not intercession

It is important to remember that praise is not intercession, nor is it spiritual warfare. Praise is directed towards God and God alone. Praise is an acknowledgement of Who God is — His greatness, power, majesty, sovereignty, and so on (see 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 for example).

Praise is to God and for God; unlike intercession, it is not against the enemy, nor is it on behalf of someone else. Praise and thanksgiving are a pure offering to God — for He alone is worthy.

Praise is not a weapon

Praise is not a weapon — it is worship, adoration, a humble declaration of the goodness of God.

Praise, in itself, does not bring the victory, but we will praise God when He assures us of victory. And victory is certain if we are on God's side!

When King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah were surrounded by enemy armies they fasted and prayed and sought God's face. They called on the Lord for mercy, help and deliverance. They reminded God of His past goodness and promises. They said to God, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You".

Then God heard their prayer, and through a prophetic word He assured them of victory: the battle was not theirs but God's, and He would win it on their behalf.

Because they had sought the Lord with prayer and fasting, and because God promised them the victory, they were then able to go forth in faith, worshipping and praising God, with the singers and musicians out in front! And God gave them the victory! (See 2 Chronicles 20:1-30).

"Fear not!"

Why are we able to praise and give thanks, even in the midst of a battle? Because we are on God's side, and there is no room for fear, doubts, or defeat. Over and over again God assures His people, saying, "Fear not". "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7)

Paul, writing to the Romans, says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? ... In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us ... [Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:28-39).

No wonder we can praise and worship God in the midst of adversity. No wonder the Bible says, "Rejoice always. Pray constantly. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Worship before service

Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Matthew 4:10). It is significant that "worship" comes before "service".

Are you battle-weary? Are you feeling tired and worn out by much intercession, by many spiritual battles? Are you under a strong, prolonged spiritual attack? Perhaps you need to again turn your eyes upon Jesus and spend much time in loving Him, worshipping Him, thanking Him, adoring Him. Do not neglect to give to Him what is due only to Him – praise and worship. Get your eyes off your circumstances, your problems, your battles, and realize afresh that He is right there with you — and with Him, victory is assured!

Some Biblical examples of songs of praise

The book of Psalms contains many examples of songs of praise, especially Psalms 92 to 150. The psalmists did not have life any easier than we do, but they recognised the importance of praise and thanksgiving, and they worshipped God even when things were tough. (Indeed, many of the greatest songs come out of the depths of adversity, not when things are easy!) Moses and the people of Israel sang a song of victory and triumph as they praised the Lord for delivering them from the Egyptians (Exodus 15:1-21).

Finally, the worship of Heaven is described for us in Revelation as God's creation worships round His throne (Revelation 4:8-11; 5:8-14). This is but a foretaste of the glories that are to be revealed. First the battle, then the victory, then all praise and glory to the Lord of Hosts!

QUESTIONS

1. What wrong motives can we have for worshipping God? Why should we worship God?
2. How should we worship God? (John 4:23-24. What do these verses mean?)
3. What is a "sacrifice of praise"? (Psalm 116:17; Jeremiah 33:11; Hebrews 13:15; 2 Samuel 24:24).
4. What is the relationship between spiritual warfare, and praise and thanksgiving?
5. Why do we spend so much time asking God for things and so little time thanking Him?
6. "Thanksgiving for past blessings and answers to prayer helps build our faith". Discuss.

13. APPROACHING THE KING

Our attitude towards God is very important – it indicates where we are spiritually; it indicates our maturity, our understanding of God, and our relationship with Him.

Jesus is our Friend, but He is more than just a "good buddy". Some years ago, there were some stickers which read "Try Jesus". It sounded as though He was some kind of commercial product that we were being offered to try, and if we didn't like Him then, of course, we could always try someone or something else. While the motives and desires of the people who printed and displayed those stickers were, no doubt, to witness to the Lord, somehow it seemed to "cheapen" Him. He is not an optional product; He is the Lord of Glory!

How do we "approach the King"?

Probably most of the time when we pray, our prayers are fairly short – asking the Lord for help in some way, either for ourselves or other people; or giving thanks for what He has done. At other times, especially when we are praying with other people, we will pray for a longer period of time; for example, at a prayer meeting.

In this chapter, "approaching the King" is being used in the sense of **seeking the Lord or waiting on Him**, over some period of time, for a special purpose, and for a special time of being "in His presence", getting to know Him, His will or purpose for something. This may take hours, days or longer, of worshiping Him, confession, and seeking to find His directions for you – what He is saying to you. This includes seeking God about major decisions we need to make, facing spiritual or other battles, and so on.

Esther 4:1 to 5:3 This passage from the book of Esther shows us a picture of how to approach the King, which is very different from the way many Christians approach the Lord.

We must be properly "clothed" when we approach the King (4:1-2). No-one could even enter the king's gate if they were clothed in sackcloth and ashes. It was not a matter of "come as you are"; one had to be washed, clean, and properly dressed.

Psalms 24:3-5 says that in order to "ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place", we must have clean hands, a pure heart, sincere and true motives, and total honesty.

Zechariah 3:1-7 shows us the need to be clothed in clean garments if we are to have "the right of access" to the Lord (v. 7). See also Isaiah 6:1-8; 64:6-7 and Revelation 19:7-8.

Romans 12:1-2 shows us that the "sacrifice which is good and acceptable to God" includes a renewed mind – a right mind, or right attitude, towards God and the things of God.

It is interesting to notice these same three things in the story of the Gadarene demoniac: he had an unclean spirit, he was naked, and he was mentally disturbed – until he met Jesus! After Jesus touched his life, he was made clean, he was clothed, and in his right mind (Luke 8:26-36).

We obey God's call

Sometimes we sense a strong call of God to approach Him in these ways. Esther had to be called before she could approach the king (4:11). Esther's task was to intercede for her people (4:8), but the problem was that she had not been summoned by the king. To go to the king without being invited, could invoke the death penalty, unless one found favour in the king's eyes. At times, we may well be called, or 'feel' the call, to approach Him.

We prepare before we come

Before Esther even tried to approach the king, she called her people to join her in three days of prayer and fasting (4:16).

We wait before God

Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, waiting. Esther found favour in the king's sight, and he held out the golden scepter of his authority, towards her. She approached and touched the top of the scepter, recognising his authority and her privilege of being accepted into his presence (5:1-2).

Her preparation, her patience, her waiting, were rewarded with, "What is your request? It shall be given to you, even to half of my kingdom" (5:3). Sharing the kingdom with the King! What a privilege!

The Tabernacle and the Temple

The Tabernacle and the Temple, in the Old Testament, also teach us things about approaching the King.

1. The Tabernacle

The innermost part of the Tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place, and this was where the Ark of the Covenant and the Presence of God (the Shekinah glory) dwelt.

Before a High Priest reached that place,

- > He first had to enter the gate into the courtyard and pass the brazen altar, and the laver.
- > He was then standing in front of the Tabernacle proper. This consisted of two parts – first the Holy Place and then the Holy of Holies.
- > He then entered the door of the tent and passed the table of shewbread, the golden candlestick, and the altar of incense. He was then standing in front of the Holy of Holies.
- > Finally, the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies through the veil – there was the Ark of the Covenant. Between the two cherubim, whose wings touched over the top of the Ark, was the Shekinah — the cloud in which the Lord appeared above the mercy seat – the manifestation of the glory and presence of God.

2. The Temple

The structure of the Great Temple (Solomon's temple) was somewhat similar.

In order to reach the Ark, the High Priest had to:

- > Go up the steps and through the gate into the outer court.
- > Go up further steps and through the gate into the inner court.
- > Pass the brazen altar, the brazen sea, and lavers. Then go between the two bronze pillars into the Holy Place where the tables of shewbread, each with their lampstand, were.
- > Passing the altar of incense, he could then go through the veil into the Holy of Holies.

The purpose of the above detail is to show that a person (even the High Priest) did not rush into the presence of God. Besides the above, there was much else that had to be done before one could enter the presence of the Lord. (Of course, in Old Testament times this was reserved for the priests alone, and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies).

"Call on the Name of the Lord"

Having said all that, there is also a converse! Obviously, in times of emergency, we don't have to wait and prepare ourselves before we can speak to God.

It would be considered impolite for a child to barge in on his parent's conversation, interrupt what they are doing and demand attention, unless the situation was so urgent that that was necessary.

Likewise, there is a way to approach the Lord, and yet, should it be necessary, we can call on the Name of the Lord immediately, any hour of the day or night. (See Psalm 121; Proverbs 18:10; Joel 2:32; Hebrews 4:15-16).

We knock at other people's doors; why do we "barge into" the Lord's presence when there is no need to? We need to learn greater respect for the Lord. We need, where possible, to be patient, unhurried and to wait silently on Him.

"The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20). "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). We need to get to know God: His Sovereignty, power, and authority; His wisdom, knowledge and love; His patience, justice and mercy.

We need to learn to wait on Him and His good pleasure and time. He gives the directions, not us. We so often ask Him to bless this and that, rather than wait on Him to find out His will. He will bless that which is of Himself.

Yes, we can pray at any time of the day or night; we can pray while doing the dishes or mowing the lawn. But we need to be careful of developing an attitude of merely squeezing our prayers into a few moments while we are doing something else, as if God doesn't really mind if we are doing something else while we try to talk with Him. No wonder we get distracted while praying! If most of our praying is done over the sink, or in the bus, or while trying to get to sleep, then it may be showing some confused priorities and a poor attitude towards our Lord.

Our attitude towards God and towards prayer is very important. The "Try Jesus" philosophy is not good enough – certainly not for mature Christians! We should approach Him with a sense of awe, realizing His holiness, majesty, and authority. We must not become careless, frivolous or slovenly in our approach or attitude towards Him.

"Enter His gates with **thanksgiving**, and His courts with **praise!** [Not with loads of requests!] Give thanks to Him; bless His Name!" (Psalm 100:4). Don't presume to barge into the presence of the King of kings and expect Him to be awaiting your good pleasure! Learn to approach the King as the Lord of Glory!

QUESTIONS

1. What do we learn from Esther, about how we should approach the King?
2. What do we learn from the Tabernacle and the Temple, about how we should approach God in the 'Holy of Holies'?
3. Why do many Christians today seem to have such a casual attitude towards God and the things of God?
4. How will our approach to God differ in urgent situations from those occasions when we have more time? (Compare Romans 10:13 with Psalm 46:10)
5. How do we "wait on God"? What do we 'do'?
6. How can we best help young Christians to learn the right approach to our King?

14. ON BEING A SOLDIER

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him" (2 Timothy 2:1-4).

One of the problems with many Christians today is that they are thoroughly entangled in "civilian pursuits" — so much so that the demands of being a soldier of Jesus Christ are shunned or ignored. We are not only in the world, but the world is in us too! The pleasures of this world have blinded us to the call of Christ to take up our cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23-24). The cost of true discipleship and the price of being a soldier, is not something that is spoken of much these days.

Let us look at eight "unpopular" words that are part of the character and life of a true soldier of Jesus Christ:

Discipline

It is very easy to become slack and mediocre in our Christian lives. As long as we are not seen to be any worse than other Christians, we think we are all right.

But an undisciplined soldier is not only a disgrace to the army, but he can also be a downright danger! Paul said, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things ... I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air, but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

We need to discipline our lives: our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We need to discipline our eating, our spending, our time, and so on. We need to resist the temptations and lusts of the world, the flesh, and the devil. For Christ's sake, as good soldiers, we need to be a disciplined people.

Between rigid asceticism on the one hand, and careless indifference, compromise and laziness on the other hand, is the balance which we should be seeking to achieve.

Self-control

"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and of love and of self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

If we truly love Him Who we serve; if we are truly a part of His army in this world, then we will be willing to exercise self-control and to obey His commands. A commander commands; the soldiers obey!

"Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation, for the spirit indeed is willing [to obey and serve the Lord] but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). We need to exercise self-control over our minds and discipline them to be obedient.

Commitment

To enlist in the army is to commit oneself to the cause until the battle is won. You don't just join and pull out when you feel like it! For the Christian soldier there is a lifelong call to commitment to the cause of Christ and His Church.

Too often we give up, especially when things get a little tough. Warfare is "blood, sweat and tears" — it is not "coffee and cake, with your feet up on the couch!"

Are we just as committed in the tough times as in the good times? Just as marriage is a

commitment "in times of prosperity or adversity, whether richer or poorer, in sickness and in health" (yet many people drop out in times of adversity, sickness and hardship), even so the Christian's commitment to the Lord and His service should be a constant one, come what may!

Perseverance

God knows our weaknesses and the temptations to give up. Hence He exhorts us to persevere to the end: "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22). "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). "Keep alert, with all perseverance ..." (Ephesians 6:18). When the going gets tough, the tough get going!

Sacrifice

Jesus taught that before we choose to follow Him, and all that that implies, we should first count the cost (Luke 14:25-33). "What king going to war does not first sit down and take counsel as to whether he is able with 10,000 men to meet him who comes against him with 20,000 men?"

Are we willing to pay the price? Are we prepared to suffer for His sake? In New Zealand it is "easy" to become a Christian and live like most Christians live; the price is not too high — yet! Unlike our brothers and sisters in Christ in many other parts of the world, we have "not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood" (Hebrews 12:4).

But all who will really live Godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Are we willing, if necessary, to pay the price?

We may talk a lot about "ruling and reigning with Christ" — and this is true — but before the crown comes the cross! (See Revelation 2:9-11).

These are solemn words, but God is calling for soldiers to join His army, not for holiday-makers to join His tour group!

Loyalty

"Do you own thing" is not the motto of the Lord's army. His army is to be a disciplined, united, loyal, and faithful band of Christians. Loyalty to one another and to the King are paramount in this army. There can be no unfaithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:2), no turning back (Luke 9:62), no selfishness (Philippians 2:3). We are part of a team; co-workers with Christ in the war against darkness, evil, sin, unbelief, and so on (1 Corinthians 3:9). We must encourage one another, support one another, be loyal to one another, and to Him.

Submission

He is Lord, He is King, He is God. We are His servants, and as such we must lovingly, willingly bow before Him and His will. We don't dictate to Him what we want; we ask Him, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"

Obedience to the highest of all authorities — the Lord Himself — is of paramount importance. Insubordination is unthinkable; rebellion is intolerable.

We, soldiers in the army of the Lord of Hosts, are to work together as a team, mutually submitted to one another (Ephesians 5:21), under the Lordship of Christ Himself, Who has called us and enlisted us.

Together — you and I, and the rest of God's army — we are invincible. United, we conquer; divided, we perish!

Service

We are called, in God's army, to serve. Not to lord it over one another, but to serve one another and, corporately, to serve Him (Mark 10:35-45).

As His servants we need to realize that prayer does not put God on our side; it should put us on God's side! Hence the need to see things and to pray from a divine perspective — God's perspective (Isaiah 55:8-9).

This is humbling, costly, but infinitely and eternally worthwhile!

A supporter once said to Abraham Lincoln, "I hope God is on your side"; to which Lincoln replied, "My great concern is that I am on God's side!"

*"Soldiers of Christ — Arise! and put your armour on;
Strong in the strength which God supplies, through His eternal Son!"*

QUESTIONS

1. Why do many Christians seem to give up so easily?
2. What can we do about it?
3. What has Matthew 13:1-23 got to teach us about this problem?
4. Why are the "eight unpopular words", mentioned in this study, seldom preached about today?
5. What are some other analogies between being a soldier and being a Christian?
6. In what areas, and in what ways, should Christians be militant?

15. “AN EXCEEDINGLY GREAT ARMY”

When the 12 spies returned from spying out the Promised Land, ten of them came back saying the people inhabiting the land were giants and that they seemed like grasshoppers by comparison. But Joshua and Caleb, the other two spies, said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it ... If the Lord delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us ... Do not fear the people of the land for they are bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us" (Numbers 13:1 to 14:9).

How do we see the Church? Do we see ourselves as grasshoppers before the "giants" in this world? Do we see ourselves as small and insignificant, or do we see the Church as an exceedingly great army — invincible, in God's hands? Jesus said, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell (death) shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

It is time for the Church to wake up, to stir herself, to arise and be the army of God we were intended to be – the army of the Lord of Hosts, the King of kings.

Soldiers of Christ – Arise!

Ezekiel 37 describes a vision which the Lord gave to Ezekiel (v. 1-10). This vision, originally given concerning the nation of Israel, is just as true of the Church today as it was of Israel about the year 600 BC.

The need for a vision

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). It is a divinely given vision which motivates us to pray, to cast ourselves upon the Lord, and to act as He leads us. A God-given vision will inspire us and motivate us to press on until the vision becomes a reality.

Every Christian ought to have in their hearts a vision of the Church as God intends it to be – pure, holy, God-glorifying, mighty, invincible. Then, by God's grace, we should seek to be like this — both individually and corporately.

Do we have a vision of the Church as God conceives it? (See, for example, the first three chapters of Ephesians, and also Ephesians 5:21-32).

Yet what did Ezekiel see in his vision? A valley full of bones — many bones, scattered bones, dry bones, dead bones! (v. 1-2).

The situation looked hopeless to Ezekiel, just as every graveyard looks hopeless! "Can these bones live?" God asked Ezekiel. Wisely (perhaps doubtfully), Ezekiel replied, "O Lord God, You know!" (v. 3).

The need for a prophetic voice

Then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones (humanly, a foolish thing to do!). It is one thing to have a vision in our hearts; it is another thing to have the **faith** to prophesy that vision into being! But God gave Ezekiel a divinely inspired prophetic word for the bones that caused them to come together, to rise up and live! (v. 4-6).

How we need such prophetic utterance in the Church today! "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord ...'" Hopeless? No, not if God is in it!

The need for unity

When Ezekiel was obedient, and prophesied as he was commanded, the dry, scattered, individual bones came together in unity to form a body: "bone to its bone" (v. 7).

How we in the Church need to come together — bone to bone — to be seen together as the one glorious Body of Christ! But we must have a **vision** of unity before we will see it in reality!

The need for the bond of love

What we need is more than just a superficial coming together, bone to bone. We need to be bound together by sinews.

It is relatively easy to get churches and leaders to come together for "dialogue" or for special occasions like praying for important needs, for special evangelistic meetings, etc., but the sinews which bind us together permanently are genuine love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, as fellow members of the one true Body of Christ, and a willingness to work together! As long as there is suspicion, gossip, rumours, lack of trust and love, our "unity" will only be superficial. We must love one another as God loves us (1 John 4:7-21). "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Therefore, God commands us to be "forbearing of one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

It has been said many times before but is worth repeating – unity does not mean uniformity. God does not expect us to all be the same; in fact, He created us all different! Churches do not have to be all alike, just as different parts of our bodies are all different (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). But we should all seek to work together in harmony and upbuild one another in love! (Ephesians 4:15-16). Too often we tear each other apart, rather than build each other up!

The need to be attractive

The bones came together, they were tied together with sinews — but there is nothing particularly attractive about that; it is still a skeleton! So God clothed them with flesh, and bound them together with skin, as one coordinated, beautiful body. Now they were real, visible, attractive bodies!

To all who have eyes to see, Christians should be the most attractive people, the Church should be the most attractive organisation, and the Christian life should be the most desirable lifestyle there is. But is this the image we convey to the world? Christ's Bride is to be "presented before Him in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, ... holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27). After all, that is what the Bridegroom is like!

Does the world see the Church (you and me) like this? The flesh is what the world sees — "reality", in the world's eyes. The world does not discern our motives, our spirits, and so on; it only sees the outward. So the world often misunderstands us. Nevertheless they **should** see us functioning together in love, as a body — even if they don't understand!

The Breath of Life

But bones can be brought together, tied together, covered with flesh and skin, even look attractive (like a body prepared for burial) — and yet still be dead, until the Breath of Life is breathed into them! (cf. Genesis 2:7).

The Breath of Life in the Church is the Holy Spirit. Unless the Breath of God breathes upon us, and moves amongst us, we are dead, our services are dead, our lives are dry and uninteresting.

O how we need the wind (breath) of the Holy Spirit to breathe on us again so that we are "continually filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) and rise up onto our feet as a living army!

What are some of the encouraging signs that the Church is again awakening to the call of God?

An exceedingly great army

When the bodies rose up — complete — bone to bone, bound together with sinews, covered with flesh and skin, breathing, alive! — they rose up as an army! They were not dancing or just enjoying themselves (although there is, of course, a time for that); they rose up to be an exceedingly great and awesome army.

Some people have said that the Church is a "sleeping giant". If this is true then it is time that the sleeping giant was aroused! "So I prophesied as the Lord commanded me, and the breath (Spirit) came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet — an exceedingly great army" (v. 10).

So there we have it in a nutshell: the need for a vision; the need for the prophetic ministry; the need for unity, love, beauty and the life of the Holy Spirit; and the need for the Church to rise up as an army in the service of the Lord of Hosts.

Soldiers of Christ – ARISE!

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the Church likened to an army?
2. If the Church is a "sleeping giant", how can it be aroused?
3. What is the purpose of the prophetic ministry? Is it still in existence today?
4. To what extent is the Church today inspired by, motivated by, and directed by the Holy Spirit? Or is it pretty much like any other man-made organisation?
5. "Unity does not necessarily mean uniformity". What does this imply in the context of the Church and churches?
6. What lessons does 2 Chronicles 20:1-23 teach us about fighting seemingly impossible battles?

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“Book” – in print. “Online” – online, see page 51 below for links

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