

**“Be Strong in the Lord
by Putting on the Breastplate
of Righteousness”**

by Elder Bill Jones

For the last few months we have dealt with the Apostle Paul’s concerns that our lives are reflective of an ongoing spiritual warfare. He uses “Putting on the Breastplate of Righteousness” as an analogy to express the need for spiritual armor to deflect the many—sometimes unexpected—blows of the adversary which can come from any direction at any time. The analogy is appropriate not just for the people of Paul’s day—or our day—but for every one every day in the history of mankind.



It was Paul’s intent to alert all who would listen that they were to put on the armor of God in defense of their spiritual lives. He warned the Ephesians that they wrestled not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness; and he told the Corinthians that even though they may walk in the flesh there was to be a distinction in their warfare. It was not to be waged according to the flesh. He reminded them, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

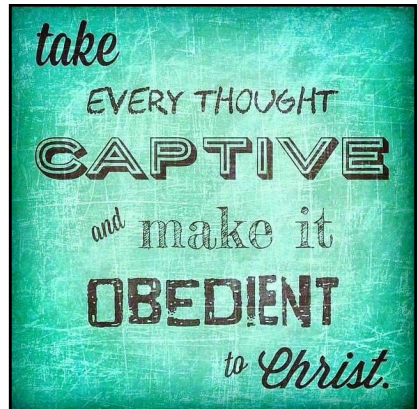


Our scriptures tell us we are fighting a war against Satan, who seeks to destroy us. If we choose to use the time-worn expression, **“WE ARE IN THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES,”** we would be correct. It is important for us to understand the severity of this battle and that we need to respond appropriately.

It is an interesting choice of words Paul uses in the three verses we just quoted from 2nd Corinthians to describe the conflict in which mankind has always been engaged. First of all he assures us that the weapons God supplies for our spiritual warfare are “MIGHTY,” meaning we can have confidence in their effectiveness. Next he identifies what they are capable of doing: pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against knowledge of God. The “strongholds” are those ways of life which have been built up over time to obstruct the progress mankind is supposed to make in moving toward God and the Kingdom of God. Our imaginations and ideas and opinions (meaning every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God) are those things which provide the avenues through which Satan can access and exploit our weaknesses. He does this by providing misinformation and false ideas or concepts that are designed to exalt themselves above the knowledge of God and then persuade us that they are more credible or worthy of being believed.

Such thoughts weaken our trust and our faith in God. We may be tempted to think we know better than God. It leaves us vulnerable to doubt. We may find ourselves imagining or creating scenarios in our minds that lead us to think perhaps God might not do the things He has promised. It is at that moment—without even realizing it—we are tempted to exalt our knowledge and understanding and put them above the knowledge and wisdom of God. At such moments Paul suggests we should **BRING INTO CAPTIVITY** (or call into mind) **EVERY THOUGHT WE HAVE THAT LEADS TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST**. Our actions are influenced by our thoughts, and if our actions are to be righteous, they must be in line with the Word and Commands of God.

The Word of God is the only adequate foundation we have for righteous living. His Word is a source that reveals a life to be lived which is moral and ethical and righteous. God's precepts and His edicts are not arrived at through man's logic. To paraphrase Arthur Oakman, from his book Belief in Christ: They (meaning God's Words) are to be received in faith. They are beyond the reason and logic of the world, and they are to be relied on and understood through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

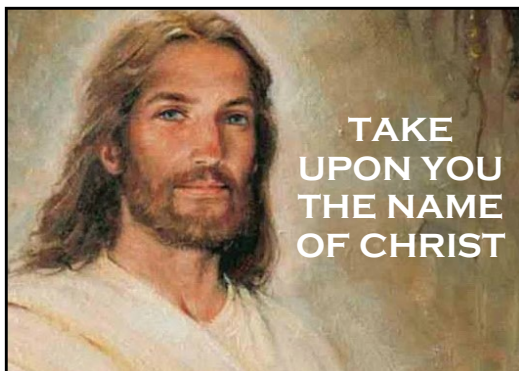


It is important to have a righteous spirit. Being righteous literally means to be right; to have the quality of being morally right or justifiable; to be acting in accord with God's divine or moral law. If we choose to act in accordance with God's righteousness then we have chosen to conform to a standard that is set by God which always reflects who He is and what He expects.

Figuratively speaking, the Breastplate of Righteousness is that which conforms to God's standards and is designed to protect the vital parts of our bodies (or in this case the life of our souls). It is essential to our lives and to our welfare. It is not made out of just anything. It is not as though we can just put on an old coat and think it will protect us. It has to be of special construction, such as keeping all the Commandments of God, following the examples of Christ, repenting of our sins, and having special attributes such as faith, hope and charity. Special materials such as these have to be used to protect us from the forces of evil. Do we think that putting on the Breastplate of Righteousness will magically protect us from the thrust of the adversary or immediately put us in line with the Words and Commands of God? No, it will not.

Putting on the breastplate is like making the decision to take upon us the name of Christ. It is a beginning. It is a journey. We work at it one day at a time and every day the breastplate has to be maintained or polished

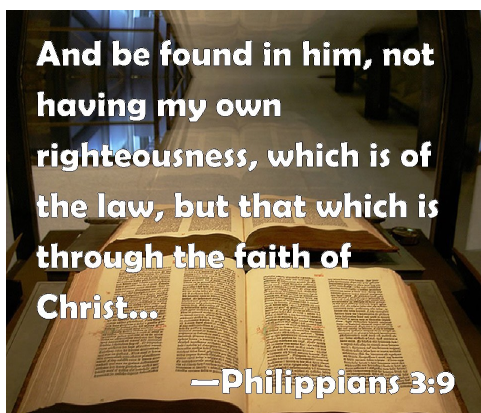
or repaired. Every day we have to be in the process of making correct choices by having our thoughts centered on God's Word; because what we might consider to be righteous does not always align with God's view.



Before Paul was converted to Christ, his life was a prime example of having his views not always aligning with God's. Paul had been a Pharisee. They believed in God's Commandments, but they also believed in additional commandments and laws of their own making, turning them into doctrine and distracting from the Word of God.

Apparently the Pharisees hoped the extra laws and doctrines would make them more righteous. In other words it was the old, time-worn idea that more is better. Sometimes we too can be tempted to do similar things by innocently devising extra requirements in our minds that we think will bring us closer to God, but the concern should be that they may distract us from God's intent.

In Philippians, Paul expressed a similar concern. He wrote that his goal was to gain Christ (having him to be more a part of his life) “And be found in him, **not having mine own righteousness**, . . . but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). In other words, Paul wanted Christ to become more a part of his life not by any righteousness Paul may have contrived, but simply because of the faith he had in Christ and the faith he had in the righteousness of God.



We do not put on the Breastplate of Righteousness according to our standards. It is done according to God's standards—the standards we agree to uphold by the covenants we have made. Our faithfulness to God's Commandments or to God's Word should always be a part of our armor, and an essential part of who we are, wherever we are, or whatever we do. We should follow Christ's example of constant righteousness.

Jesus said, I do always those things that please My Father. Jesus was showing us the life we should live and the faith we should have that surrenders itself completely to God. If you want an example, then look no further than to the story of Abraham and his wife Sarah when they were old. God promised Abraham and his wife they would have a son—at a time in their lives when they were so advanced in their age it seemed to be an impossible event. But because of the way Abraham conducted his life, faithfulness and believing in God's Word was as natural for him as choosing and putting on the clothes he would wear for the day. He believed that God's promise to him would be kept. It is worth noting the way Abraham's reaction is described by Paul in the Bible.

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded [having no doubt] that what He [God] had promised He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed [credited] to him [Abraham] for righteousness” (Romans 4:20-22).


Abraham completely trusted God. His trust pleased God. That is why it is so important that we recognize the significance of Christ's Words when He said, I do always those things that please My Father, instead of Him having said, I do always some of the things that please My Father. (See John 8:29)

If you combine Paul's statement with another that Christ said, “Ye are therefore commanded to be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect,” (Matthew 5:50) you then realize it is unacceptable to be inadequate in how far you go with your efforts. If we are to put on the Armor of Righteousness and actively be one of Christ's disciples, think what the scriptures mean which say, “Verily I say unto you, It is not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, that shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in Heaven. And many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name; and in thy name cast out devils; and in

thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I say, Ye never knew me; depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:30, 32, 33). These scriptures mean that these people were not Christ’s true disciples. Something was lacking in their relationship. He did not know them. He did not dwell in their hearts. They were not of the same mind as Him; and as Paul explained **whoever loves God is known by God**. He knows who His sheep are. The indication here is that we must do all that the Lord expects. Jesus talks about achieving perfection by doing all that God requires. If we don’t, the implication is that we really don’t know Him. We must go all the way with Him.

The Sermon on the Mount indicates what manner of people we are to be. (See Matthew 5)

Which of the following could we do without?



Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto Me,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are all they who do hunger and
thirst after righteousness,
for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.

Blessed are all the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children of God.

(3 Nephi 5:50-56)

As you can see, we cannot exclude any of the things (listed on the scroll on the previous page). We must incorporate all of them into our lives if we are to be found acceptable. All of Christ's Gospel must be used in the Breastplate of Righteousness for it to be complete and effective and capable of affording us the protection we need.

We have the promise that the sure knowledge of God and Jesus Christ is imparted by the gift of the Holy Spirit. If we trust in that Spirit and are committed to stepping out in faith to keep God's Commandments, and do so faithfully, then those things which are like the Righteousness of God will become an essential part of who we are.

Isaiah described Jesus' character in this way: "... righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (Isaiah 11:5). In other words, His righteousness is always with Him and always connected to Him; like Jesus, we should carry our righteousness with us wherever we go.

