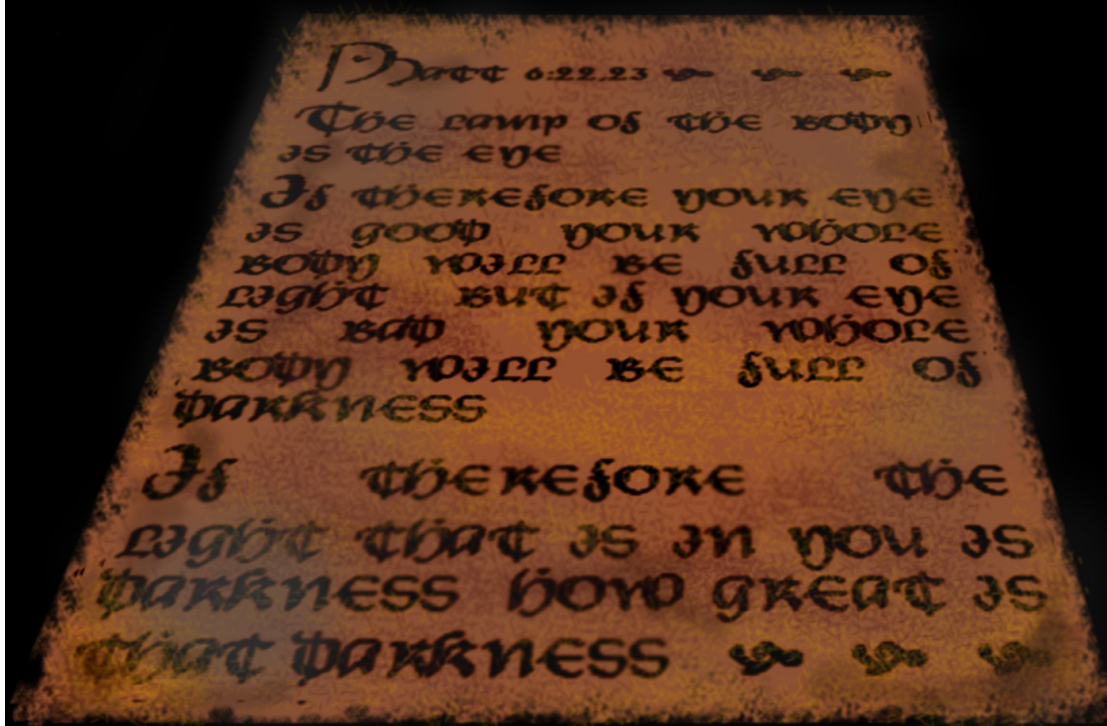


Eyes

by robbly charters



Plus: *Wearing the Whole Armour of God*

Eyes
plus
Wearing the Whole Armour of God

by Robby Charters

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Eyes

Matth 6:22,23 ❧ ❧ ❧

The lamp of the body
is the eye

If therefore your eye
is good your whole
body will be full of
light but if your eye
is bad your whole
body will be full of
darkness

If therefore the
light that is in you is
darkness how great is
that darkness ❧ ❧ ❧

The Parable of a(n) '(un)Certain Samaritan'

alternately: *The Parable of the Good Levite (and the Bad Samaritans)*

Luke 10:30-36 (with a dash of Matt 6:22 and Luke 11:34 thrown in), retold with some literary license by yours truly (of whom it is often said, 'He should have his license revoked'):



A certain man went down from the old city of Jerusalem to Jericho (which everyone knows, is a dangerous route to take in a car with an Israeli registration plate), and fell among terrorists, who, having forgotten to bring their guns and pipe bombs, settled for simply stripping him of his raiment (and the car of useful parts), and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down that way a certain American minister with a number of his parishioners on a 'visit-Israel' tour. The minister spake unto his parishioners and expounded unto them that which is written in Luke 11: 33-36, which verily were the words of Jesus when he was nigh unto that very spot.

'The eye,' spake he, 'is the lamp of the whole body. As our Good Lord said, 'If the eye be whole, the body is full of light!''

Then asked one of his parishioners unto him saying, 'What is meant by the saying 'If the eye be whole?''

'Verily, it meaneth that one has discernment of spiritual things,' spake the minister. 'One is hitherto led of the Holy Spirit, who is the giver of light unto our path.'

And when he saw the 'certain man' lying there, he said, 'For instance, I verily feel the leading that we must pass by on the other side.'¹

'But, should we not stop to help this man?' said one of the parishioners.

The minister rebuked him, saying, 'My brother! Where is thy discernment? For verily, I say unto you, of this man's foolish deeds came this misfortune upon him. For this is surely a drug addict, and in a gang fight got he these wounds. If we help him, surely, he will act unwisely yet again because of the foolishness of his heart. Therefore, wouldst we not have really helped him. And furthermore, have we not other priorities? Surely this would undermine our ministry unto which we are truly called, and we shall be found bad stewards of God's grace!'

And they passed by on the other side.

And likewise a German theologian, who was a visiting lecturer at a local seminary, when he was at the place with some of his pupils was expounding unto them the 'sermon on the mount.' He had quoted unto them the passage of Matthew 6:22,23.

Said one of his pupils, 'Professor, whence is it said, 'a good eye?''

The theologian answered and said unto him, 'One with a good eye is he who is enlightened. He knoweth that there is more than the eye beholdeth. He verily knoweth how to discern both the old wisdom and the new.'

'What new wisdom doeth he discern?' asked the second pupil.

'He discerneth the wisdom of the politically correct,' saith he, 'For verily, I say unto you, political correctness is derived from modern enlightenment.'

'And what of the old,' asked another.

'Behold, that is the ancient wisdom of 'common sense,' which when married to political correctness is verily the epitome of modern thought.'

Then came they unto where the 'certain man' lay, and looked on him.

'For instance,' said the theologian, 'Both common sense and political correctness would compel us that we should pass by on the other side.'

'Wherefore shouldest we not help this man who lieth here half dead?' asked the first pupil.

¹ This, of course, is not typical of all American ministers or German theologians, any more than Yeshua's original parable was typical of all Levites or Priests.

The theologian rebuked him, saying, 'Where is thy common sense? For it is not right that we, being foreigners here, shouldst involve ourselves in this, a local affair. For surely, this is a trap to draw us into an ambush. And where is thy political correctness? For verily he was a mad settler of occupied territories here to gun down innocent Palestinian women and children. If we, being foreigners befriend such a one, though he was attacked first, it would create an international incident that would verily shed bad light on the poor Palestinians in their fight for justice!'

And they passed by on the other side.

And behold, there was no certain Samaritan, because one part of the Samaritans were parishioners of the American minister, and the other part were pupils of the German theologian, and behold, they had become exceedingly 'uncertain' as to what they shouldst have done. Likewise, the 'certain man' was exceedingly 'uncertain' whether he would survive the ordeal.

And surely he would not have survived, but that there also came that way a plain old Jewish rabbi who followed close on by the American minister and the German theologian.

And behold, he was down-wind from both, and the day was quiet, and he had heard both the American minister and the German theologian and their 'uncertain Samaritans'.

And as he journeyed, he came where the man was: and when he saw him, said, 'Oi veh! These Christians! For surely, if they knew that this Yeshua of theirs was a Jew, and spoke in the Hebrew tongue, they would verily know that 'good eye' is but a Hebrew idiom, and that moreover, their eye is bad, bad, BAD!'

Then proceeded the rabbi to show that his eye was better than theirs, and had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine² (cursing himself for not bringing a proper first-aid kit), and brought him to a — well, you know the rest of the story.

Perhaps not *exactly* the way Yeshua³ told the story 2000 years ago — although maybe if he had told it today instead ...?

The point is, by missing the vital importance of the statement Yeshua made in Luke 11:35 and Matthew 6:22, we may find ourselves on the wrong side in the story of the good Samaritan.

But to understand the statement to begin with, we must know that 'good eye' is simply a Hebrew idiom that means a generous heart, and 'bad eye' means a stingy, or greedy heart.⁴

Yeshua was fond of the pun. Unfortunately, puns don't translate very well, which is why many of us missed it, but he never the less told it as a pun:

'How is the eye the lamp of the body?' he would have asked.

"Cause you see light with it?' Peter would have ventured.

'Right! If the eye is good (generous), the body is full of light!'

2 The oil was for a salad his wife was going to make, and the wine was for *Shabbat*. He also had candles, a jar of pickled herring, a dozen eggs...

3 'Yeshua' is simply the Hebrew way of saying 'Jesus', used here because it's the way His name was pronounced when He was on earth. If you prefer 'Jesus', that's okay too.

4 But wasn't Aramaic spoken in first century Palestine, not Hebrew? More and more scholars now believe that Hebrew was still a living language during the time of Christ. An excellent book, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus* by David Bivin and Roy Blizzard Jr., (1983,1984, Centre for Biblical Analysis, Destiny Image Publishers,) gives striking evidence. For instance, the 'original Greek' of the Synoptic Gospels is grammatically correct (or passable) for the most part, but definitely not the sentence structure that a knowledgeable Greek writer would have used. However, when you transliterate it word for word into Hebrew, it comes out in perfect idiomatic Hebrew, without having to paraphrase it. For just that reason, it's obvious that the Synoptic Gospels were originally in Hebrew, but were transliterated into Greek in much the same way as the Septuagint (the first Greek translation of the Old Testament which is also quoted in the New Testament). Other internal evidence supports that Hebrew, as well as Aramaic was actually spoken in everyday life in first century Palestine. The Mishnah, compiled some 100 or so years later also shows signs of having been written in a living language rather than a dead language. The idiom, 'good eye' is also found in the parable of the employer, in Matt 20:1-16 where he said, 'Is your eye bad because I'm generous' (vs. 15)? The Hebrew idiom fits perfectly in that context.

'Oh! *I* get it!' Peter would have went on. '*Spiritual* light, right? A man with a *good* (*generous*) *eye* walks in the *light*! It's a lamp! Get it, Andrew? Get it, John?'

'Yeah, yeah...'

'And,' Peter goes on, 'A man with a bad (stingy) eye, that means his lamp is out right? That's a good one, Rabbi. You're funny! Tell us *another* pun!'

What Yeshua told as a pun 2000 years ago is vitally important to us today.

Why?

Because that is the secret to walking in light.

We talk so much about light, the Word of God being a light to our path, walking in the light, and letting our light so shine before men, but half of us don't even know how to turn the light on! We're always preoccupied with the question, 'What's God's will for my life?', but it seems like we're feeling our way around in the dark, listening for a still small voice, groping for the switch.

Yeshua tells us how to turn it on. To turn on the light, first we must know where the lamp is located — that's our eyes. Now, we know that a good eye is a generous heart, so we know even more clearly where the lamp is.

This meaning fits perfectly into the context of both passages. The 'good eye' passage in Matthew 6:22 follows right on the heel of Yeshua's comments on 'laying up treasures in heaven,' and just before where he says, 'no one can serve two masters.' The whole section is about generosity, and the value of possessions versus people and relationships.

Now did you *really* think the Gospel writers were so scatter-brain they couldn't stick to the same subject very long? All of Yeshua's sayings fit in their context. Sometimes you just have to know what he has been talking about to begin with. Sometimes you have to retrace backwards a whole chapter or two to pick up his train of thought.⁵

In the case of the 'good eye' passage in Luke 11:34, you have to back up to Luke 10, where we find the parable of the good Samaritan, which we just looked at. We will examine the context of the Luke account in the final chapter, when we see how having a good eye, and seeing people as Yeshua saw them, is the key to understanding the whole purpose of God.

Mind you, we are not talking about giving offerings and donations. Lack of giving is only a symptom of a deeper problem — suffered also by some who do give good offerings. We'll talk about that in another chapter.

We're not even talking about the 'prosperity message' — although if we all had a 'good eye' there would be no trouble on either side of that argument. That is, there would be neither the over balance on the part of a few on one side, nor the controversy about it on the other.

What exactly, then, is the 'good eye' that Yeshua is speaking of? Just what is the generous spirit Yeshua means?

A good eye is one that sees as Yeshua sees, and places value where Yeshua places value — on *people*.

People are of far more value to Yeshua than resources, than assets, than time, even than reputation. For Yeshua, people were even more valuable than his life!

A truly generous person willingly gives all of those things out of love for *people*.

We're not talking about people who have generous moods, people who give just to feel good. We're talking about those who recognise the *value* of people over all those other things. You can tell which ones those are because their love for people expresses itself in *relationship*.

⁵ One rabbinical rule of interpreting the Torah is that though the events are often not recorded in chronological order, there is a purpose for the order you do find. A vital principal, or a train of thought can be found throughout sometimes a dozen contiguous passages. This also holds true of the gospels.

One with a good eye is one who values *relationships* for their own sake. Anything less is only lip service to some abstract ideal.

Anything less, and we end up emulating that great child philosopher, Linus Van Pelt, who said, 'I love mankind. It's just *people* I can't stand!'⁶

To love mankind, we must *relate* to *people*.

God's covenant with man isn't a sales contract; it's a *relationship*. God didn't simply promise to Abraham that He would deliver the goods (though He did that too) — He instituted a *covenant* whereby man would be God's *friend*. That's why breaking bread around the table together and drinking wine is a part of both the Old and the New Covenant. You eat and drink with *friends*. It's *relationship*! 'Greater love has no man than he who gives his life for his *friends*!'

Some people give their life for a cause, or some abstract concept of 'mankind.'

Yeshua *didn't*.

He gave his life so that man could enter into an intimate relationship with Him.

Yeshua is the Son of God. He was in the beginning with God. He *was* God! He had everything people consider valuable: assets, resources, time and reputation.

Yeshua had *assets*. He had power to *create* assets in case any were lacking!

He had *time*. He *filled* all time. He was the beginning and the end.

He had *reputation*. He was God! What better reputation could you ask for?

Yet, Yeshua valued man that He had made far more than assets, resources, time and reputation. He gave that all up to be born as a man.

Evens a man, he could have easily accumulated assets and resources. He could have used the twenty four hours a day he was allotted to his best advantage for his own welfare and comfort. He could have maintained a reputation as a great man simply by agreeing to reign as Messiah on the people's terms.

After all, he had already given up so much just in becoming a man! Why give up more?

But even as a man, he valued his fellow man so much he gave that all up.

He was moved with compassion. Sometimes he didn't even have time to eat because of his compassion. His mother and brothers thought he had lost his head because he was spending so much time helping people.

He hadn't lost his head. He just had a good eye!

Some of us *do* lose our head, but that isn't due to a good eye. We're not being moved with compassion — we're being moved by our guilt complex, by our sense of duty, by our desire for success, so as to gain a sense of accomplishment or by our obsession on 'being in God's perfect will'. Yeshua was moved by none of those things. He was moved with compassion, so he didn't suffer a nervous breakdown even though his mother and brothers thought he surely would.

Yeshua had a good eye. He loved mankind, but, unlike Linus, he also had compassion on *people*.

He built relationships with people. He visited them in their homes. He ate with them. He worshipped with them. He talked with them as he went down the road. He told jokes to them, and laughed at their jokes. He wept with them. He got angry at them. He hugged them.

Finally, he gathered his closest ones together and had a covenant meal with them.

It was actually the Passover seder, the covenant meal Moses commanded the people of Israel to eat when God delivered them out of Egypt. It's the meal where they don't eat regular bread. They have to eat matzah instead — that is, unleavened bread.

When it was time to take a particular piece of matzah that had been broken off of the middle piece (the afikomen), he said, 'This is my body that is to be broken for you.'

Then it was time to pour the cup of wine for the fourth and final time in the seder. He did so, and

⁶The late Charles M. Schultz, *Peanuts*; — I forget which issue.

said, 'This is my blood I'm about to shed for you.'

Shortly afterwards, his body was indeed broken. It was whipped and mistreated in every way. He was falsely accused. His words were taken out of context and made to sound like something he had never meant to say. His reputation was ruined, but he just kept his mouth shut.

People's souls were more important to him than that.

He was beaten until he was unrecognisable. His back was cut open with a whip that had bits of sharp bone tied to the ends. Then, he was administered a very torturous slow death that was normally prescribed only for convicted terrorists.

Most pictures of Yeshua on the cross look so dignified compared to how he really looked. If I had a picture of how he probably *really* looked printed on this page, you'd keep this book on the very top shelf where your children can't reach it. He looked like something that wasn't even human!

He allowed all that to happen to him because he valued *people*. It was *that* important to him to bring *people* back into intimate relationship with God.

To have a good eye is to see people as Yeshua saw them — to put the same value on them as Yeshua did — to... *let your attitude towards one another be governed by your being in union with the Messiah Yeshua: Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God something to be possessed by force. On the contrary, he emptied himself, in that he took the form of a slave by becoming like human beings are. And when he appeared a human being, he humbled himself still more by becoming obedient even to death — death on a stake as a criminal! Therefore God raised him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name; that in honour of the name given Yeshua, every knee will bow — in heaven, on earth and under the earth — and every tongue will acknowledge that Yeshua the Messiah is ADONAI — to the glory of God the Father.* (Phillipians 2:5-11 CJB).

The only way to have light is to have a good eye — to value people and relationships with people the same way as Yeshua did.

When we see things as Yeshua sees them, are motivated by the same things that motivated Yeshua, when we are moved with compassion as Yeshua was — that, by the very definition, is being in the light.

It's automatic.

Now We Have A Word For 'Thank You'

The measure of a 'good eye' (or should we say 'eyesight') is our use of the word, 'thank you.'

It used to be that the Karrén people, who inhabit the Southern half of the frontier area between Thailand and Burma, did not have a word for 'thank you' in their language. Then, Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary to be sent overseas, went to Burma. His arrival with the 'Golden Book' fulfilled an ancient prophecy that was part of their oral tradition. They believed that at some point, the 'white brother' would come and give them the 'golden book' to replace a book they had lost through neglect.

Also, the fact that this particular 'Golden Book' contained an account of creation and the fall of the first man that was identical to their own oral tradition was another factor that influenced a large section of this tribe to accept the message Judson came proclaiming.

They had all this in their tradition, but no word for 'thank you.' What were they to say to the white brother in return for the Golden Book? They had to make up a word, not only to say to him, but because the Golden Book itself uses the word so often it would be almost meaningless if the word were to be left out.

So, they invented the word and Judson supervised the translation of the Bible into Karrén. To this day, both the Karrén and the Burmese standard translations of the Bible have printed on the title page, 'Translated by Adoniram Judson.' In the process, the Karrén language gained a new word, 'Tablue,' or 'Thank you.'

Having been around Karrén people a lot, even from childhood, I knew the story of the 'white brother and the Golden Book,' but only recently, when Brother Dennis was taking me to visit a Karrén village did I hear from him that the word for 'Thank you' was only invented as a result.

Mind you, they *did* have a concept of debt of gratitude. If you save someone's life, they're indebted to you for the remaining portion of it. Do someone a big favour and you're entitled to one in return.

That's not the same as 'thank you.' 'Thank you' is an expression of appreciation, but a debt of gratitude can be a burden in the end.

But can you imagine not having a word for 'thank you?'

I began thinking about it. The end result is this book. — Well, I hope *that's* not the *end* result. I hope *I* continue to become more thankful, among other things.

I began thinking about it, and realised it's not so hard to imagine after all!

For many people, including some Karrén that weren't so directly affected by Judson's ministry, many Thai and Burmese, and many in the West; 'thank you' is no more than proper etiquette. You say it just to avoid being rude, or even to partially pay off your 'debt of gratitude.'

turkey day...

In North America, they have a wonderful holiday called 'Thanksgiving.' It was instituted as a day to give thanks to God for everything one can think of to be thankful for, but especially the survival of the early pilgrim fathers through their first harsh winter, and subsequent abundant harvest through the help of God and some of the local Indian tribesmen.

Being that they feared God and had a 'good eye', Thanksgiving began as a holy time of reverence, complimented by feasting, which of course both enhanced and expressed *relationship*. Even the Indians joined in.

More recently, however, Thanksgiving has become, in many North American minds, 'turkey day.' It's

simply a time to put up posters of men in stove-pipe-hats with big collars, to get together with the family (which is good), and 'chow down!' Probably the real reason for its survival is to keep turkey farms in business, as hardly anyone eats turkey apart from during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

So what if 'thank you' suddenly vanished from our vocabulary? Probably no one but Miss Manners and her faithful readers would even notice!

the darkness...

So how are we different from the early Karrén?

Good question!

For the Karrén it was a new concept in need of a new word to express it. For many of us, it's an idle word with no longer a concept behind it.

This is truly a sad, sad state of affairs, for nothing better illustrates the truth of the statement, 'If the eye is bad, the body is full of darkness, and how great is that darkness.'

Where there is no appreciation of people, we take things for granted. We become dependent, either materially or emotionally on others, or on circumstances with no hope of out-growing that dependence.

Darkness is apparent in that there is no motivation to rise above the dependent state. We don't see any reason to grasp for new knowledge or to try to understand new concepts.

Why?

We don't appreciate people — not even that person who is extending a helping hand. It is as though fate determined that help would come in the first place.

The situation is that much more complicated when help comes on a regular basis, as with support for a third world church by a foreign mission; one who's employment seems secure for the long term; or even to one living on poverty level, via the welfare state in a western country.

The *assumption* that the present support system will last forever, overrides any thought as to exactly who is providing that support — whether it's some generous donor, a parent, an employer, a talented employee, or the tax payers. There is no discernible face associated with the sustenance — just fate.

It's not even a *philosophy* of 'fate;' just an acceptance of things as they are, and perhaps some animosity towards the donor for not providing more. We are like children being spoon fed with no thought as to where the spoonful of porridge comes from, though we entertain the wish that it were ice-cream instead.

That is the intense darkness we have brought on ourselves. Insensitivity and irresponsibility are the direct result.

How does light come?

As soon as one becomes acutely conscious of the *person* behind the support, then the support itself gains a whole different perspective. Every dollar, pound, baht or kopeck suddenly sprouts a face! The equipment we use sudden gains value. It *belongs* to someone we know personally, or it came out of the generosity of someone's heart. In the case of the social welfare recipient, the support came out of someone's blood and sweat (i.e. half of the national population often working so as to support the other half through their taxes).

In some cases, there's nothing to do but to continue receiving, but with an attitude of thanksgiving; with new resolution to use the support to greater advantage so as to bear fruit on behalf of the donor.

In other cases, especially if we realise we are a burden on others, there is the motivation to move onward from dependence to independence, and onward still to interdependence.

The true inward desire to move onward is the direct result of knowing where we are in relation to others. That desire then motivates us to grasp at wisdom and knowledge that will enable us to actually take steps in that direction.

Thus, our IQ is directly related to our 'eyesight.'

I always wondered, why is it so difficult for some people to grasp certain truths? Why is it that you can teach and teach and they never 'get it'? Why is that trait especially evident among particular cultures? Are some cultures *really* inferior?

No. It's due to 'eye problems.'

Some whole cultures, like the Karrén, don't know how to appreciate people. But so much can change via a relatively small adjustment in our attitudes and perception.

So how is *your* eye sight?

Even if we aren't in a position of dependence, we still need to ask ourselves that. For one thing, *independence* isn't the final stop on the bus ride of life, but rather *inter*-dependence. For that, we need good eyesight.

So how's your eyesight? In answering that, you may find you are more dependent than you think (some bosses are even dependent on their employees)!

those close to you...

Your eyesight is only as good as it is towards those closest to you. The thankfulness of your heart is measured by how you express it towards those you *live with*.

Do you thank your mother for a fine meal she's cooked as heartily as you would your boss's wife? Or do you express appreciation to your spouse as convincingly as you would to the local councilman? Any great amount of difference between the way you show thankfulness to those very close to you, and those whom you want to impress is purely *etiquette*; not genuine appreciation.

I know because I also once had a mother. I'm glad I learned to appreciate her before her passing. However, there were times when she would go out of her way to cook a delicious meal (which was indeed an effort on her part as she was more of a missionary than a housewife), only to be overpowered by comments like, 'This meat is over done. You *know* I don't like beef well done,' or 'I would have *really* preferred ... *etc.*'

My mother rarely complained. She was the epitome of a soldier and a pioneer missionary — all without making anyone else feel inadequate. But I know she must have felt disappointed when her genuine attempts didn't result in a thankful satisfied son.

I began to realise later on that she was probably just as affected as anyone would be by my comments. Had the lord mayor's wife cooked an identical meal for me as my mother did, I would never have *dreamed* of saying to her what naturally flowed out of my mouth toward my mother!

I think it was because of her faithful prayer for me that my eye began to open ever so slightly while I still had the opportunity of showing gratitude to her during her life. I showed gratitude to her but I never apologised to her for my previous ingratitude.

It is said that one's attitude towards one's mother will later be the same attitude one has for a wife. A good eye can save many a marriage. I'm glad I married late.

This is important, because it's the *close* relationships, such as between parents and children, between spouses, between siblings — maybe we could include room mates — that determine how good our eye *really* is. Relationships like these are easy to neglect, as it is the close relationships that are the easiest to keep hidden under cover while acting like everything's 'just fine.' Eventually, though, a bad eye will show up in other areas as well.

One pastor of a church was well loved by his congregation because of his wonderful sermons, until one day, his wife walked up the church aisle carrying his two suitcases full of clothes.

He asked her, 'Why are you bringing those here?'

She answered, 'You're such a wonderful loveable person as long as you're behind that pulpit. I just brought you your clothes so you can stay there *all* the time!'

Now, a lot of this is starting to sound very uncomfortable to some of us. Some of you are wishing you

had stopped while you were ahead — when it just looked like this would be an ideal book to buy for your self-centred mother-in-law.

By all means, buy her a copy! But don't *you* stop reading *now*! We've only accomplished the first objective! That's to make *you* feel uncomfortable!

The next objective is to improve your eye, or, in the context of this chapter, to gain a thankful heart.

The final chapter will go into other remedies, but here, we'll begin with the easiest one:

Start thanking God.

What to thank God for?

Thank God for your close relatives. Thank God for your friends. Thank Him for your enemies. Thank Him for your mother-in-law (and buy her this book). Thank him for anything you can think of.

oil fields and Persian cats...

The thing is, when you start thanking God on a consistent basis, and practice making it come from your heart, that will change *you*. We'll talk more a couple chapters onward about how intimacy with God ought to affect intimacy with others. Start thanking God now for every blessing you can think of; and, provided you're a slow reader, if it hasn't done anything for you by the time we get to that chapter, we'll start looking at some possible reasons why.

Thanking God sincerely from your heart should not only change you, but it should also change that person, situation or thing for which you're thanking God.

How?

Because it's an exercise of faith.

How is that so?

By thanking God for something, you're acknowledging God as the one who gave it to you.

Does God ever give you anything that's of no value at all?

No?

Then is there a divine purpose involved?

Then by thanking God for it, you're placing faith in God that what he gave you has value and God will cause that person, situation or thing to fulfil the purpose for which God brought him/her/it into your life.

That's the only non-manipulative way there is to change someone, because it involves accepting them *as they are*.

Thanksgiving increases the value of whatever it is you're thanking God for.

To illustrate that — there are two ways of getting rich: One way is to increase your assets. That's how most people try to get rich.

The other way is to increase the value of what assets you have. One way of doing that is through thanksgiving.

Let's just say, for example, you inherited a piece of land away out in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The soil is barren, so nothing can grow on it. It's too far from anywhere to make it worthwhile building on. That would make the commercial value of that land just about worthless.

Let's just say, again, that unbeknown to you, there is a vast supply of oil below the surface of the land. The potential value of that land, therefore, is in the millions. However, you don't know that. Neither does your estate agent.

You have two choices. One is to complain and fuss. 'This is terrible! How could Uncle Joe be so inconsiderate as to leave me *this* piece of land! He left cousin Jack the old manor! Wasn't I better to him than cousin Jack? How often did cousin Jack visit him in the old folks home anyway? And cousin Sue got all his antiques! So she arranged flowers for him! So what! And after all I've done, all I get is this worthless bit of dirt! At least he could have left me the Persian cat!'

The result will be that you get less back for that property than the value of the Persian cat.

The other choice is to thank God. 'Thank you Lord for Uncle Joe's life while he lived. He was a blessing to us all. Thank you for this piece of land he left me. I confess I have no idea what it's good for, but since you gave it, it must be good for something! At least I can come here and camp out under your stars at night and spend time with you alone. I thank you for it. Bless Jack in that old manor of Uncle Joe's. Let it be a blessing to him. Give Sue a good price on those antiques, and bless the Persian cat...'

Just as you're pacing back and forth praising God, you inadvertently kick a boulder loose, and up it comes — black gold!

Well, perhaps it won't happen quite as dramatically as that, but really, we're talking about *people*, not property nor Persian cats.

Each person contains many times more value than the vast oil reserve under Uncle Joe's old property. Only a 'good eye' will uncover that value.

However, we need to be careful how we see people in this regard. In the next chapter, we'll see how, even in this respect, we often misplace our values without even knowing it. We'll then make a mid-course value correction.

What Do You Think I Am -- An Asset?

There is one statement often made by popular leaders, both in the business world and in the church, which I take exception to. It sounds good on the surface until you examine the implications word for word.

That is the one liner: 'We count our people as our greatest assets.'

You agree that it sounds good, *nu*?

You're wondering what in the world I see wrong with that statement, *nu*?

I seem to be contradicting everything I've said so far in this book, *nu*?

I will grant you that most dynamic leaders who say it don't realise what they are saying.

What they are saying is, 'People are an means to an end,' or 'People are assets.'

The point of this book is, 'People do *not* represent assets, they represent *relationships*.' 'People are not a means to an end — they *are* the end to whatever means we have.'

Though the error is very subtle, church leaders who make the said statement are implying that the church is built on assets, and that people are valuable in that they are assets.

That is a wrong concept

The kingdom of God is not made up of assets. It's made out of *relationships*. The stronger the relationships in the church, the stronger the church. A church can lose *all* of its assets, but it is not any less *the church* for the loss. If the relationships are all intact, the church should not be any weaker or any less vital for the loss of its assets.

Even with all its assets, a well endowed church is only as strong as the relationships in that church.

Even if each member is supposedly a 'strong' Christian, they read their Bibles every day, they tithe faithfully, they pray, they seem to love the Lord; if their relationships within the local body are weak, then the church is weak.

Notice that I said *supposedly* strong, and they *seem* to love the Lord. According to I John 4:20, the love they have for *each other* is the only true indicator of whether they *really* love God or not.

If each one is pursuing their own interests and not committed to one another, the church is weak. Even if they're following after the vision of their local church, and not committed to *one another* in *relationship*, the church is *still* weak; because they've failed to submit the vision for their *local* church to *God's* vision for the church *at large*. The church is therefore weak, and the only remedy is some good eye treatment.

Now, let's look at another situation that looks nice on the surface. We'll quote once again from 'Robby's contextualised version' of Mark 12:41-44:

□ □

And the great pastor sat over against the treasury, and beheld how his members cast money into the treasury for the building fund: and many that were rich cast in much money. And there came a certain dear old lady, and she began to endorse her pension cheque.

And he called unto him his members, and saith unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, that this dear lady hath cast in the 'widow's mite!' She has put in more than all ye which have cast into the building fund: For all ye did cast in of your abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even unto her whole pension cheque. For verily I say unto you that if every one of you shall give as this woman has given, and give their 'widow's mite', surely we shall speedily build our new gymnasium unto the glory of God. How many of you do vow this day to give the 'widow's mite?' I see thy hand, the Lord bless thee, — yea, for verily I see thy hand — and thy hand...'

Then said the dear lady unto her friend, 'Verily, that was but equal to the tithe from the sale of my dress

shop!

The concept of the widow's mite is one of the most misunderstood concepts — especially by fundraisers.

If the goal is to gain a certain amount of money to meet building expenses, then the widow *didn't* out give the others *at all!* She gave the least. The rich man who gave the most currency gave the most.

Be realistic! How will the budget be met the quickest — by a room full of poor widows giving their all, or ten billionaires each giving a hundred thousand? So what's all this talk about the widow's mite?

But Yeshua *did* say she gave more than them all, didn't he?

Yes, he did; but what was the object of the giving? Was it to keep the High Priest's radio program on the air? Was it for a new synagogue in Gamala?

No. The object of giving is the Lord.

That widow was not speeding up the construction of a new gate for the temple. She was giving of *herself* to the *Lord*. She was partaking of intimate relationship with the Lord in a form of worship.

Why was her offering more than what all the rich people gave? The amount of currency is immaterial. The important thing is it came from *her*. She, as a person, was of value to God. How much money she had was immaterial. The relationship God had with her was every bit as valuable as the relationship He could hope to have with a CEO, or the lord mayor, or the High Priest. Her prayers to God were every bit as precious. Her turtle-dove that she offered as a peace offering was every bit as valuable as King David's heifer. In this case, the worship was expressed in the form of a financial donation.

The goal of all giving of tithes and donations should be *worship* — not trying to make it to the bank on time — for exactly the same reason that the church consists of *relationships*, not assets.

Assets cost more or less money, depending on their value. People, viewed as assets, are worth more, or less, depending on their abilities, their talents, their physical strength, their strength of character, and their net worth.

Thus, if you consider them as assets, the rich man is worth much more than the widow and her two mites.

However, people, as potential *relationships*, are worth infinitely more.

The funny thing is, when you recognise that fact, and you begin to *relate*, they *do* become your greatest assets, *but only when you forget about people as assets!*

It's like trying to look straight at a dim star at night, or trying to count the 'seven sisters.' The moment you look straight at it, it disappears. You can't see it! Only if you look away from it does it reappear. Many things in life are like that. Those who pursue directly after riches have the hardest time obtaining it. Those who simply do what they enjoy doing, and take pride in their work are the ones who get rich in the end — but not by trying to get rich.

The same is true of obtaining the best people have to give. It won't even work if you say 'I want to obtain the greatest results from *people*; therefore I'll emphasise relationships.' That can become one of the worst forms of manipulation if you don't watch it.

No. You must emphasise relationships for their *own* sake, because you have a good eye and love people — not what you can get from them.

Now you see how much of our effort is misplaced. Some of us spend so much time and effort trying to get close to certain people. We'll go to hear a famous preacher sooner than a 'no name.' We vie to sit at the same table as the well know celebrities at luncheons. Sometimes that's because we've been told, 'Stick around successful people, or with anointed people, and their success/anointing will rub off.'

There is a truth to that. There is a time to seek an impartation of anointing, and that is *some* of the

time. There is also a time to pursue relationships, and that happens to be *all* of the time.

But how do you know that the totally unknown individual who happens to be sitting alone at table 6 isn't anointed? How do you know that the lady sitting at table 8 isn't the very widow who gave the two mites? How do you know it isn't *you* who has something that needs to rub off on someone else?

Finally, how do you know that 'God's great man of faith and power' sitting at the head table isn't just about to be exposed in some filthy scandal? When the scandal breaks the very next day, will you be just as quick to go to him and offer him your love and friendship? *That's* when he'll need the benefit of your relationship! Only if you're just as quick to offer it to him *then*, will you be justified in having pursued an impartation of his anointing the day before. Receiving an impartation is important, but it must be in the context of *relationship*.

Just as the widow and the rich man are equal in God's sight, even so they are equal in the sight of the man with the 'good eye'. When you begin to truly value your relationship with the widow; just as Uncle Joe's plot of 'barren' land (in the previous chapter), even so, the widow's mite will gain tremendously in value.

Value, in God's kingdom, isn't broken down into dollars and pounds. Once true value of a relationship is realised, it can *result* in dollars and pounds if that's what you truly need at a given time, but that will always be secondary. It can also result in anointing, or in a number of resources, but the primary value is the strength of the relationship. Only when you find your total satisfaction in relationships will you also profit from the secondary benefits.

So what about the widow's mite? That is the fruit of the relationship. The value of the mite depends on the value you place on the relationship with the widow. *Better a vegetable dinner with love than a stall-fatted ox with hate*, said King Solomon (Proverbs 15:17 CJB) The power of the mite depends on the strength of the relationship between you and widow.

Mind you, we aren't talking about souvenirs or tokens of remembrance. We're talking about something ever so much more powerful! It's the same principal whereby Paul sought to enhance the relationship between the believers in Corinth and those in Jerusalem. He encouraged them to prepare an offering, but the underlying value wasn't in the amount given, but rather...

...the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (II Cor 9:12-15 —NKJV)

There is a whole new dimension expressed in those verses that we, as a whole, haven't even touched yet. There is a longing for one another. There is grace in each of us that is to be released on behalf of one another. That can only be known when we fully explore the potential of relationships.

Only then will we *truly* understand spiritual gifts. Good works, as mentioned in Galatians 6:9, Titus 3:8 and Eph 2:10 are also a part of this. We'll never really understand these principals until we fully understand *relationship*.

Remember the homework assignment I gave you in the previous chapter? You were to begin thanking God for every blessing you could think of. Now I'll expand that just a bit:

Do what Paul said the believers in Jerusalem would do, and thank God for all the brothers and sisters in Christ God has placed in your life. Thank God for every act of kindness you can remember; for every 'widow's mite,' and every 'Corinthian offering' you have received, and pray a special blessing on that person who gave it. Don't be brief, but dwell on each one, and let your faith soar on behalf of each one. That will further help turn your barren plot into an oil field, but most important, it will strengthen your relationship.

Is There Life Beyond Novelty?

November – Uncle Harry gave us a lovely video player last Christmas, and it was the first video player our family has ever had, so of course, we feel grateful to him. Now we can watch videos every weekend, and we've become a member of the local video rental outlet, and our kids now feel they can hold their heads high, because they've seen the latest out of Hollywood. Of course, whenever Uncle Harry is in town, we make sure we cook up something special and put out the fine china and linen. And the kids, they get so excited every time he comes, they're all over him. - I wonder what he'll give us this Christmas?

Late December – Well, Christmas has come and gone, and now it's time to send the thank you cards. Well, let me see, what did Uncle Harry give us? Oh, yes, a toaster. *Sigh* – I had hoped so, that he'd give us a wide flat screen TV to go with the video. It would have made our movie watching more like a cinema experience. And it's not like he didn't know what we wanted. Last time he was here, we made sure we dropped the line, 'wouldn't it be nice if we had one of those new flat screen TVs!' He just didn't take the hint did he!

February – *Sigh* – Uncle Harry's in town again. He would choose such a busy time, but – well, he is our uncle, after all, so we should have him over, right Hon? Too tired to do up anything special? Okay, I'll order KFC.

The following day – My daughter overheard me telling someone, 'Harry's coming over tonight'. Her face lit up, and she said, 'Harry Potter?!' I put her straight, and her face fell. 'Uh, *Uncle Harry*.'

That evening – Uncle Harry came over, we sat around and ate chicken. He didn't stay very long, because the kids all wanted to watch a video (the Harry Potter movie, I think). He seemed a little bit disappointed – I think he expected a little bit more of an evening, but I mean, come on! Does he expect royal treatment every time he sticks his head in?

Too bad, Uncle Harry was no more than an asset. And as an asset, he broke rule number one of asset-self-management, which is: always make sure your next dividend (read: gift or peace offering) is bigger and better than the previous, because as an asset, you are only valuable as long as the novelty lasts.

That's why I much prefer a genuine relationship to being an asset.

But the real reason for the above illustration is to show how a bad eye affects not only our view of people, but also of things. The things that we want always seem so much more valuable than the things we already have, and with it, the value of the giver, or that of the potential giver.

No matter how badly we feel we need something, be it a promotion, a labour saving device, a luxury item, or whatever, its value will never outlast its novelty once we've attained it. Of course, we'll always appear thankful to God and to the giver, but only while novelty lasts. Once the new thing or situation is accepted and finds its place as a permanent fixture among our other crutches and dependencies so that it give us a more elevated view of things, we're suddenly enable to see what more other people have that we don't have yet, and our focus shifts to that instead.

The “great Irish dream” (what so many Irishmen left the shores of the Emerald Isle to find in

America) is a life of constantly moving upward, socially and economically, to ever higher plateau. Our whole western mind set has become based on this. We are told to set goals, and focus our activities so as to move ever forward and upward.

Even in the Christian world, we seek ever bigger and better churches, evangelistic campaigns, church and Sunday school attendance and offerings. For the more “spiritual” of us, it’s ever more profound “touches” from the Lord, greater and more amazing miracles of healing and more thunder and lightning complete with angelic visitations.

I don’t mean to belittle all that, but it’s just that the children of Israel had all of that, and they *still* grumbled when things were less than what they expected.

They witnessed the miracle of food falling from heaven every morning. Soon, they complained that they were tired of nothing but the same old miracle food every day, and wanted regular down-to-earth food, so God sent them quails. They ate quails until it came out their noses.

We all know the story, how they murmured and complained all the time.

But they had so much already! They had witnessed God defeat the super-power of the day, Egypt, the evil empire, single-handedly. They saw the Red Sea part, and they walked through on dry land. All the special effects that movie companies today spend millions of dollars on, they saw live, with no film editing at all! Food was given to them every day, water was provided, their shoes didn’t wear out, and they came away with the riches of Egypt.

Wouldn’t they have done much better had they learned to enjoy what they had instead of wishing for what they didn’t have?

Now, everything that they were wishing for was in the planing. It was coming. All they had to do was be patient, and have faith for it, but instead, they put it off for another 40 years because of their murmuring and complaining, and forgetting all about what they already had – things that they would one day proudly tell their wide-eyed grand-kids all about. But then, it meant nothing to them.

Now, were they such experts at murmuring and complaining? Was that a story of how especially bad the Children of Israel were – or maybe it’s about human nature that we all have? If the story of Uncle Harry and the video player is anything to go by, and I think that more of us can identify with it than will care to admit, it’s human nature.

It’s about *us*.

So, is it possible that our onward and upward progress may be held up because we fail to maintain a thankful attitude for what we already have?

God, in many ways, is no different than Uncle Harry (Uncle Harry *was* created in God’s image, after all). God likes to give, but if we appear profoundly less thankful for the toaster than for the video player; or if we stop being thankful for the video player because it’s already a permanent fixture, and moreover, we thought it was time for a flat screen TV; is he inspired to keep giving us gifts?

I Timothy 6:6 says, *godliness with contentment is great gain*. The more literal Complete Jewish Bible, beginning with the previous verse says, *...they imagine that religion is a road to riches. Now, true religion does bring great riches, but only to those who are content with what they have*.

Am I mistaken, or is this yet another paradox? (That is a ‘pair of doctors’; one says ‘it’s this way,’ and the other says, ‘no, it’s that way’, and they’re both right) How does one strive to be rich and successful when one is already content?

It’s all in how one defines ‘riches’.

To the bad eye, riches are measured by assets – money, resources, status, material possessions, things that *appear* to bring happiness. The drive to attain these things is called *ambition*.

Ambition is really just the counterfeit of *hope*. Hope is what drives faith. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for* (Hebrews 11:1 KJV). That’s what drives the person with a good eye.

The good eye sees what really *does* bring happiness – relationships with people, and with God.

There are material possessions involved, yes, but they go so much further for the good eye, as they serve to enhance the relationship aspect.

In actual fact, the people who get rich the quickest are those who thought they were already rich. They're content with what they have, because such a great part of what makes them happy is the people around them. That attitude affects their lifestyle, and even their business practices. That's the point where *true religion brings great riches*, as we saw above.

A businessman with a good eye is thankful towards his or her clients for their business, and does his utmost to make them happy, because he or she delights in reciprocating a good turn. The joy with which the client is served, and the quality of service, of course, inspires the client to keep coming back for more, and even send other business his way.

This is a pattern we see continuously in the business world. Those whose soul aim is to make money, have the hardest time reaching their goal.

Sometimes we want something so badly, we'll never achieve it. Like we mentioned earlier, trying to count the Seven Sisters. Or have you ever looked and looked for something you misplaced, only to find it later, while looking for *something else*? The secret is to seek the right thing. The right thing is contentment, and being happy and thankful with what we have.

It's those who do what they do because they *enjoy* it, and those who strive for excellence, and put customer satisfaction before everything else, including profits, that suddenly find they have more customers than they know what to do with (a good head for business should find the balance between enjoyment and profit). A restaurant where the chef enjoys cooking is a much nicer place to eat, and attracts more diners than one where the chef is only doing what he's paid to do. When one is happy about what one is doing, and one enjoys making *people* happy, then the money and assets follow naturally.

So, contentment comes first, and *then*, material success. The secret is to be content and happy with what you have even when the novelty has long worn off.

As of this writing, I've had my car for six months, and I'm still counting how much taxi fare I've saved. I still remind myself what a low price we paid for it, and yet, what good condition it's in. I hope to still be counting saved taxi fares a year from now. Even though many an Audi and Mercedes has overtaken me on the expressway, I'm happy. The novelty has worn off, of course, but continually thanking God for it is a good exercise in assets management.

The same thing goes for how God has blessed our ministry, or our personal blessings we've received spiritually.

It's one thing to just say, 'be happy with the toaster', when we really had our eye on the flat screen TV. If we're honest with ourselves, and recognise that our eye needs healing, then we'll keep seeking God for His eye salve. It won't happen overnight, like I've said earlier, but at least you're reading the right book. We'll continue to talk about ways to receive healing for our eyes, and to exercise ourselves so as to strengthen relationships, so keep reading.

A good place to start is practice thanking God for things you have already – things that were novelties once, but you find yourself now, taking for granted. Just keep doing it until it gets to your heart, and affects your eyes.

Big Brother is Watching (and so is 'Little Brother')

One controversy that has dogged the church for centuries is that concerning predestination — the question of whether we, ourselves made the ultimate decision to come into the kingdom of God and eventually make it to heaven, or if God made the decision who would end up in heaven and who would end up in hell. It's quite a fiery controversy in some circles. There are also many shades of belief between the two.

Whether one side is 100% right and the other 100% wrong, whether there is truth on both sides, whether it's even a relevant question to begin with — I have good news: I'm not here to answer that question. I'll leave it for you, my readers, to argue it among yourselves.

I just want to address one of the arguments made by *one* of the sides, and what I say may give support to the *other* side, but beyond that, I'll be of no help whatsoever.

The argument is: if God is sovereign, if all things consist in Him, if it's His plan to sum up the ages in Christ and set up His kingdom and affect the downfall of Satan's kingdom, if God is indeed in control, then He must be the one who ultimately decided whether you would turn right and attend the evangelistic meeting, or turn left and head off to the pubs — or whether you would raise your hand in response to the alter call or fold your arms and pout.

Of course, folding your arms and pouting was an important occurrence in the eternal scheme of things, not only in that you rejected salvation, but the actions involved caused, what scientists call, the 'butterfly effect'. According to mathematicians, a butterfly flapping its wings in Central Africa has an effect, however minute, on the course of a typhoon in the South China Sea, even if it's many times too small to be measured by any measuring device or standard known to man. If it caused any sort of effect on *anything*, then it affects the future, so it must be under God's direct control.

That, of course, is one of the arguments for double predestination, as opposed to free will. In other words, if God is truly sovereign, He must have planned every single movement of every single person, animal, or object. Many, of course, may not hold this opinion to quite that extreme.

My answer is: God is even *greater* than that. He is able to allow everyone to make their own choice, and even mess things up on a grand scale (which we have), and *still* maintain control over the course of the world. His wisdom is infinite. No matter how deep the effects of the wrong turns go, God's wisdom goes still deeper. He knows exactly what to whisper into the ear of the butterfly in Central Africa to make it have just the right effect on the tropical storm in the South China Sea, so as to counterbalance your failure to fold your arms and pout in the evangelistic meeting.

Satan may be cunning and clever, and we may be frightfully stupid, but God's wisdom anticipates both Satan's wiles and our amazing stupidity. He knows laws of physics and deep secrets of the universe that Satan knows nothing of. After all, He created them.

To prove it, He dealt Satan the death blow by a means that caught him totally off his guard — the cross.

Satan actually invented the cross. It used to be one of his favourite instruments of torture, but now he hates it with a passion.

Satan operated under the assumption that God would go about reconciling the world to Himself by some heavy-handed power-move such as Satan, himself, is accustomed to. That's the only method Satan knows of, or believes will work, and that's what he braced himself for. It took him thoroughly off his guard when Yeshua went to the execution stake — Satan's favourite toy — in such a submissive

attitude like a sheep being led to the slaughter, and quietly allowed his life to be ... — *no*, it *wasn't* taken from Him; He gave it up Himself. He beat the hunter to the trap, as it were, and just jumped right in!

Satan still doesn't know what hit him. But he hates the cross. It represents his ultimate defeat, and it continues to be the tool of his defeat at the hands of believers. I'm not talking about the fancy little crosses people hang about their necks, or place on top of church steeples;⁷ but rather, the attitude of being dead, as though by the most cruel and shameful means — crucified to the world and to everything we once thought was important.

It was by means of the cross that Yeshua gave up everything for the sake of that which he considered truly precious — relationships. It's by accepting the life of the cross that we become dead to the world and our eyes suddenly become open to the importance of relationships.

Satan doesn't value relationships very highly. He views people and other beings as *assets*. Relationships are only valuable to him in maintaining people as assets.

Assets are something you control. In order to gain the most value from an asset you must have full control over it. A good businessman takes good care of his assets, and keeps them maintained and ordered in a tidy way so he can always accurately predict and maximise their output.

Satan is a good businessman. So are a lot of people.

In the chapter on thanksgiving, we described the dark world of those who don't have a sense of appreciation of people — those lacking a good eye. The people described in that chapter weren't necessarily poor; they simply lacked the more wholesome reasons to desire prosperity — those based on interdependence, gratefulness and the desire to be in the position to help others and to return the blessings they've received. All they're left with are the selfish incentives to gain wealth, based on greed, lust, thirst for power *etc.*

There's really no difference between the rich and the poor in this respect. Both, at the same time, are dependent on, and seek to exercise control over their assets. Whereas many poor people regard their donors as no more than assets; the rich regard their employees, their secretaries, their spouses, their children and their colleagues as assets.

In one case, the fact that one is dependent on one's assets seems the more obvious to those looking from outside, and in the other case, the fact that one exercises control over one's assets seems more obvious. In reality, both are dependent, and both exercise control of some sort (or seek to do so). It's just a different type of control in each case. One is the 'big brother' type of control, and the other is the 'little brother' type.

The poor, or the 'little brothers' often exercise control by inflicting guilt, sometimes by displaying themselves as objects of pity. Sometimes they use deceit, and sometimes, political clout. Often the need to display themselves as helpless keeps them from developing towards independence because in the process, they'd lose the value of their asset. Often, control is mutual between the 'big' and the 'little' brother, and in some places, this has become the cultural norm.

The 'big brother (or sister)', likewise, depends on the 'little brothers and sisters' but in a different way. In most cases, he (or she) doesn't realise how depend he (or she) is. But they are never-the-less dependant. Any time one sees a person as simply an asset, that is a sign of dependency. In order for that dependency to be productive, one must exercise control. The 'big brother' controls through intimidation, through manipulation and sometimes through offering fleshly gratification (i.e. riches, power *etc.*). Any stimuli will do if it will increase the productivity and one's control over one's asset.

On the surface, all this may look like a lifestyle to be coveted, but in reality, it's a dark dark world.

⁷ It's by means of the fancy artistic crosses that Satan has attempted to defame the true meaning of the cross. It was Satan, himself, who painted crosses onto the shields of the crusaders as he sent them out to wreak havoc on Muslim and Jewish communities.

Fear is the motivating factor, not only through the intimidation of one's assets, but also the fear that one's assets may one day begin to think for themselves. It's fear of a world in which one has no control, and a fear of people one can't predict — fear of true mutual relationships.

But perfect love casts out all fear.

Perfect love was manifested through the cross. Greater love has no man than he who gives his life for a friend — especially through death on a cross.

The cross, itself, is proof that God is above the need to control. In the garden of Eden, God showed that He didn't fear man's potential for failure, and He even left the door open for man to make the wrong choice if he chose. And, of course, he did make the wrong choice. A *very* wrong choice. But on the cross, thousands of years later, God proved that He still didn't fear man's freedom to chose. Man chose to crucify and wound Him, but through that, Yeshua took the wounds of mankind — the deep wounds that keep many in a cocoon of fear and control.

Through the cross, man can escape that dark cocoon, and enter the bright adventurous world of relationships. By His stripes we were healed.

Say You -- Say Me; But Say It With Your Eyes

What *is* relationship anyway?

After all, we've been using that word like peanut butter on toast!

Does it mean something like your third cousin? Or your mother-in-law (for whom, as you no doubt remember, you're going to buy a copy of this book)?

Actually, what we are talking about is not a passive thing — as in 'related to' — but rather, active, as in 'to relate.'

The best description I've found so far of the simple *act* of relating, is contained in a book by Martin Buber, *I and Thou*.⁸ The fact is, I haven't even finished reading the book, and I *still* think it's the best.

Again, we're talking about the simple act of relating. Though only one of many components, it's an important one to understand.

Mind you, though, Martin Buber didn't *invent* the 'I-you' relationship. He only described it. It was really there all along. We've all — most of us that is — engaged in it at some time or another. The problem is, somewhere along the road to higher spirituality, we forget how.

I-you versus I-it...

He describes two basic word couplets: 'I-you' and 'I-it'. 'I-you' is relationship. 'I-it' is simply an experience. There is a vital difference between relating to someone and experiencing someone. However, many people have never realised that difference.

When it's 'I-it,' 'I' am experiencing 'it.' 'It' can be either a person, an animal or a thing. Either way, I'm either using 'it', analysing or observing 'it,' or else doing something to gain a response, such as talking to 'it.' 'It' may also talk to me, and we may carry on a conversation, but to me it's no more personal than using a dialogue box in a computer program.

All the while, I'm accumulating a case history of my 'it' and making comparisons with other 'it-s'.

None of this holds true when the other person becomes 'you.' When 'it' becomes 'you' suddenly we are in the 'right now.' 'You' fills up my whole consciousness. Together, we may talk about, or experience an 'it' but it's always 'I' and 'you' experiencing 'it' as one.

'I-it' always dwells on history — even history that was made a split second ago. 'I-you' is always 'right now.'

'I-you' is me relating with what you *are*, not what you've *done*. When I begin analysing what you've *done*, you're no longer 'you' but an 'it.' As soon as I've come to terms with what you've done, you can once again become 'you.' That's one reason why forgiveness and acceptance is so important in a relationship.

But when 'I' *thank* 'you,' that's different. That is 'I' basking in appreciation of what 'you' *are*, which resulted in what you *did*.

What you *are* is your capacity to give the widow's mite. You do that as 'you.'

What you *can do* or have *done*, is your capacity to give more than, or less than the rich people in our fund raising campaign in the previous chapter. That, you do as an 'it.'

For that, there's not so much a 'thank you' nor a sense of genuine appreciation, but rather, a 'debt of gratitude', or a favour that must be repaid. It's something in the history of the 'it' that must be accounted for — or worse yet, it's simply the 'it' fulfilling his or her role as an asset.

⁸ Martin Buber *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1970

However, when I *receive* from a 'you', *what* I receive is not the all important factor, but rather, the 'you' that gave it. It's not a historical thing that needs to be compensated for, but rather something to be appreciated *right now*. If there is any of what *can* be called a 'compensation', it's not something that can be measured value per value, but rather, it's my *all* in return for *your all*.

I'd much rather have you as a 'you' than an 'it.'

I'm afraid that if I keep on like this, I'll be every bit as heavy on the reading glasses as the late Martin Buber himself! The reason the description has to be so obscure, is because you can't really describe it otherwise. You either get it or you don't.

The actual relationship is really very simple. Describing it isn't. I suspect that to one who has never really related to someone before, It's like describing the colour green to one who's blind from birth.

If that's you, don't worry. There's still hope.

The reason I've described it as best as I can is so that we'll know the difference between relating and experiencing. There are times we all experience when we ought to be relating.

Worship is relationship. Too often, we experience it.

To worship is to relate directly to God — not think about Him. You never think *about* the one you're relating to. The moment you do, you're back into 'I-it.'

Too often, we stand there during a worship service saying, 'Is the Spirit moving? Do I feel the presence of God? Okay, there it is — Hallelujah — I think I'll shift into tongues — Oh! That's wonderful! This guy really knows how to lead worship ... *etc.*'

At least that's what *I* tend to do. Maybe you don't.

vulnerability...

Now, in saying all that, I must add that 'I-it' is *not* always a bad thing. Nor is 'I-you' *always* necessarily a good thing. For one thing, it is difficult for most of us to remain in 'I-you' for a protracted period of time. It's only when we are together that 'it' becomes 'you,' in the first place. Even then, it's only during peak moments.

Also, 'I-you' can be one sided. A person can be in 'I-you' mode with an inanimate object, such as a picture they are painting, or a character in a story. One of a courting couple can be in 'I-you' with a partner who is responding in 'I-it', and wonder why he or she seems so distant, or lacking in warmth.

Where this is definitely negative, is in pagan worship. The worshipper is often in 'I-you' relationship with an idol, but the demonic power behind the idol is most certainly in 'I-it' mode, analysing the situation so as to take the greatest advantage of the worshipper's vulnerability. This is a prime example of how a one-sided I-you relationship can be an effective tool in maintaining control over another person as an 'asset'.

No matter what the situation, there is always a measure of vulnerability when entering into 'I-you' mode. That just in itself isn't always bad. Everything we do entails a measure of risk. However, it's exactly that, which keeps many people from entering into personal relationships.

A rule of thumb is: people are much 'safer' when maintained as assets rather than as personal relationships. When you're wounded, you play it safe — that is until you finally open yourself to the One who was willingly wounded for you. Even that will seem like a risky venture at first.

the other components...

Also, as I said, 'I-you' is only one among other components of the wider range of what we usually refer to as 'relationship'. It *is* central, just as the c.p.u. is central to a computer. However, a c.p.u. can't function without the other components, such as the ram memory and rom-bios and other components. In the same way, in relationship, there must also be love, commitment, and certain other things which we will now look at.

What I'm saying is, the concept of 'I-you' versus 'I-it' is a powerful truth, but it must be kept in its context. Once everything is in proper perspective, this will take us a long way.

That's exactly what the Bible is for — keeping things in perspective.

Because an 'I-you' relationship *can* be one-sided, we vitally need the word of God to show us whether or not it is in fact God we are worshipping. We need yet another component — *truth*.

God is Spirit, yes, but those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit *and* in *truth*.

Otherwise, we're in danger of worshipping some figment of our fantasy, and not God at all.

Many children who live with no companions their age have an imaginary friend. They play contentedly all day and talk as though they really had a companion. They are in an 'I-you' mode with someone who's really just a figment of their imagination. Sometimes it grows to be more than just a figment of their imagination, but there are other books about that.

Unless we are relating to God in spirit and in *truth*, we're like a child with an imaginary friend.

Mind you, we *are* to humble ourselves and become as a child, but *not* in *that* way. (I personally don't believe an imaginary friend is healthy even for children).

So, how much truth do you need to worship God in spirit and truth?

As much as He's shown you.

How does He show you?

Three ways: Through 1, the Word; and 2, the Holy Spirit; and 3, through members of His body, the church; in that order of importance,⁹ but all three being vitally important

the shortcut...

But believe it or not, there's a short-cut:¹⁰

I John 4:20 says, *If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?* (NKJV)

How is that a short-cut, you ask?

First off, It's the Word of God. It's really quite a large portion of the Word of God summed up in one verse, Just as Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (*Love the Lord your God...Love your neighbour as yourself*) sum up all the Torah and the Prophets. In the same vein, I Peter 4:8 says, 'Love will cover a multitude of sins.'

Secondly, by loving God *and* loving your brothers (including the unlovable ones) you pretty well prove that you're walking in the spirit. Check out Galatians 5:22.

Finally, walking in relationship with your brother as proof that you are indeed in relationship with God, means you are open to any truth that filters down to you from God via your brother.

In other words, I John 4:20 is the ultimate test of whether your 'I-you' relationship with God is one-sided or not. If you are indeed in relationship with God, you will also relate to your fellow believers. It's really as simple as that.

If you *think* you are relating to God, but you are unable to relate to people, then you're either not in a real 'I-you' relationship with God; or else that's not God but rather your imaginary friend.

But let me tell you. The *real* God is so much better than anything you could ever imagine.

Go for the real thing!

⁹ The Word of God is of course supreme. Every leading of the Holy Spirit must be tested by the Word of God. Likewise, every leading through a member of the body of Christ must be backed both by the Word *and* the Spirit.

¹⁰ ...which actually includes all of the above.

God Has a Good Eye

Just for the fun of it, let's go back to where we started, and follow the context in Luke's account until we get to the passage about the 'good eye' (i.e. all the way from Luke 10:25 to 11:36)¹¹ What we will learn from this is that faith is simply resting in the confidence that God has a good eye.

a(n) (un)certain Samaritan...

Where we started was with the 'Parable of a(n) (un)Certain Samaritan', which is, of course, based on the 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' in Luke 10:25-37. It was Yeshua's answer to a rabbi's query, 'Who is my neighbour?' We don't have to go over the story again, but the point is — whether you go by Yeshua's original parable, or by 'Robby's Literary Licensed Version' — the one who stopped to help the poor man had the good eye, and those who didn't, didn't. The reason I changed the Levite and priest into Christian clergymen, and the Samaritan into a rabbi is to make the parable sound just as radical to us as it sounded to Yeshua's audience. In those days, Levites and priests were considered among the finest members of society, just as pastors and seminary professors are today. For some reason, we, in the 20th century have been left with the general impression that all Levites and priests were hypocritical stuffed-shirts, and that Samaritans were all wonderful people.

Now, it is quite likely that Yeshua had a surprisingly good experience with Samaritans, as we see from the account of the woman at the well of Sychar (indeed, the whole population of Sychar), and the one leper in ten that had a good eye and returned to thank Him on seeing that he had been healed. Both from these experiences and Yeshua's parable, we get the impression that many Samaritans had a 'good eye', and that this fact was hidden from Jews of that day by their prejudice. In the same way, the fact that there are many fine rabbis today who have a 'good eye' is hidden from Christians with similar prejudices.¹² (what we didn't mention in our version of the parable, 'The (un)Certain Samaritan', was that the man attacked by terrorists was actually a Christian Palestinian living in Tel-Aviv driving a rented car).

So, who had the good eye?

Marta! Marta!

Following the context from there, we go straight into another passage that explains the 'good eye' (Luke 10:38-42). Again, we'll draw from 'Robby's Expanded Translation' (If you've already read this in one of our other books, skip to the end of the passage and read on):



It was a great privilege, indeed, to have one as renowned as Yeshua stopping over all the time. After all, it's not everyone who has the chance to entertain the one who is believed to be the Messiah of Israel, and

11 One rabbinical rule of interpreting the Torah is that though the events are often not recorded in chronological order, there is a purpose for the order you do find. A vital principal, or a train of thought can be found throughout sometimes a dozen contiguous passages. This also holds true of the gospels. When closely comparing Matthew, Mark and Luke, it's obvious that the events are not all in chronological order, but there is a purpose in the order the events are recorded in. The intent of Yeshua's words can sometimes only be found when one examines the context running through several chapters. That's our purpose in this chapter.

12 A prime example was the late Martin Buber, whose skilful description of the value of relations we discussed in the previous chapter.

every time he came to Jerusalem! Marta took this privilege very seriously. In fact, she out did herself every time he came. Even the special delicacies that had been put away for *Shabbat*, or for one of the great feasts (*yom tov*), were brought out whenever Yeshua arrived. She always said, 'We really must go out of our way to make him feel welcome, because who knows? Are there not many people better than us in Jerusalem? Would he not go to lodge with them if he tires of our company?' Lazar and Miriam agreed.

Miriam always tried to be helpful, but she was more the sentimental impractical type. At times, she'd work hard, but if she were left to herself, the house would soon be declared a disaster area by the high priest! Then, tell me, who would ever stop in for a visit? It was just as well she had such an able sister as Marta around to tell her what to do. At least Marta thought so.

There was something about Yeshua that made Miriam feel good about herself. Around him, she just felt — let's say — free! At ease!

Marta was a different basket of fish. Always scolding! Oi! Veh! Miriam! Why can't you do this right! Miriam! You forgot to do that! Miriam! How many times have I told you...!

Today, Yeshua was back, sitting in his usual seat, and once again, Miriam felt good about herself. There were a number of Yeshua's pupils there as well, sitting around on cushions on the floor, as well as a few others who came along. Yeshua was once again making his remarks about this and that — you know, such ordinary sounding things, but things you would never even have thought of, but as soon as he said them, you just knew they were true! Something inside always said, 'It's about time someone said that!' Then he was illustrating them with the most imaginative stories!

This time, Miriam felt like sitting right there, plop, in the middle, listening to Yeshua with her chin resting on both hands. To tell you the truth, she'd always felt like doing that, but there was always 101 things to do in the kitchen. This time, she felt so good about it that, that's exactly what she did. Did her conscience bother her in the least? Let me tell you! As soon as she sat down there in the middle, she clean forgot that the house even had a kitchen attached! She even forgot that it's not proper for a lady to sit in the middle of a group of men. — Well, she only intended to sit for a little while, and go back to the kitchen. But the stories! The little titbits of such wisdom! It's not only that! The love that radiated from the man. If she didn't understand a single word he said, she'd just sit and bask in that love! But it was the love that made the words so understandable!

Well, to make a long story short, she just sat, and sat, and sat, and — well, now we're making a short story long again!

And Marta? Well! It just so happened that she had received such short notice of Yeshua's arrival, and who would have expected it? It wasn't even a *yom tov*! The neighbour's boy just happened to run by the house announcing that Yeshua was coming in by the road that winds around the mountain, and you should have seen the state of the house! Well, it's a good thing they had some preserved meats put away for *Shabbat*, or there wouldn't have been anything in the house worth looking at! And — why, where's that Miriam? Just sitting there doing nothing! We've got 101 things to do, and she's sitting there, listening to story after story! Doesn't she know that if it weren't for the hard work Marta was doing there would be no Yeshua to sit and listen to all afternoon? Who ran around and straightened the main room that Miriam left in such a mess? If Yeshua had seen it earlier? Why! He'd have made an excuse, and gone on to find someone else's house to lodge in! Now, who's going to stir the soup while Marta punched the dough down and patted it into small pieces? Who's going to go in and pick up the cups? Who's going to chop the onions? Who's going to ...? That's it! She had to go in and say something.

That's just what she did. She went right in to the main room, and gave them all a piece of her mind. Messiah or not, she told him! Was she going to let Miriam be the cause of him going away and never coming back? Marta could do that just as well herself! Well, look at him! At least he could chase her into the kitchen! Honestly! He just allows her to sit there, looking into his eyes like a stupid fool, when he knows there's so much work to do!

So she told them.

And what was his reaction? He looked at Marta as though she had just mistaken a porcupine for one of the cushions!

'Marta! Marta!' he said. 'Look at you! You're all worked up over so many things! Who told you you had

to hold a first class reception? Only one thing is important, and Miriam has found it! Miriam has chosen the best part, and no one can take it away from her.'

The point of this story is made by Yeshua: 'Marta, Marta! You are fretting and worrying about so many things (like maintaining *assets*) but there's only one thing that is essential, *relationship*, and Miriam has chosen it...'

So, who had the good eye?

the Father's good eye...

In the next few passages, we don't have to ask who has the good eye. God, to whom we offer our prayers, has the good eye. Yeshua's prayer (Luke 11:1-4), that He taught His pupils expresses just that, especially as it opens by addressing God as 'Father', one who looks at His children with a 'good eye'. We won't go into this prayer in detail, as it's already been done so well by others, such as Larry Lea. Besides, in this account, Yeshua interrupts Himself before He finishes what we now think of as the complete version (found in Matthew 6:9-13) with yet another parable.

We've gone from seeing how the Samaritan had the good eye in helping the mugging victim, to how Miriam had the good eye in choosing to sit at Yeshua's feet in a position of intimacy; then on to the prayer of Yeshua in addressing God as Father who has a good eye for His children. Then, Yeshua pops a parable about someone whose eye doesn't happen to be so good at the moment (verses 5-8), and quite understandably so at that. He has gone to bed already, his wife is probably a light sleeper (like mine), and not only is she lying in bed with him, but so are all his children — one on either side of him, and one on top of him — sound asleep. I don't think my eye would be so good towards someone banging at my door at that time of night.

Enter, the neighbour, who proceeds to bang on the door, and ask for bread.

Yeshua's point here is (though he doesn't say it in so many words), if, because of the neighbour's audacity, the man climbs out from underneath his children while his wife mutters that it will now be hours before she gets to sleep, just to get him a few loaves of bread, how much more your heavenly Father?

So...?

'Keep asking,' says Yeshua, 'And it will be given to you; Keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking and the door will be opened to you' (verses 9-10 CJB). Even if the answer takes a while in coming, keep at it. If a groggy neighbour eventually responds to persistence, how much more your Father who cares for you, and stays up all night looking after you?

Faith is knowing God has a god eye, and acting accordingly — acting, in fact, like a son.

Of course, there are many kinds of fathers, some with a good eye and some with a bad eye. Yeshua could have easily come up with a parable about a father who got so fed up with his son's incessant asking, that he sent him upstairs to bed without his supper. I'm sure such fathers existed in those days, as they surely exist now. But we don't hear of a single case from Yeshua. There's not a single parable like that in the Bible. Even the evil judge in Luke 18:1-5 never had the annoying woman bumped off, but gave in to her pleas.

snake or fish?

Yeshua said to his pupils, 'If you, being *bad*, know how to give good gifts to your children (verses 11-13), how much *more* your heavenly Father with the *good* eye!' Even a bad father — unless criminally insane — wouldn't give his son a rock to eat instead of bread, nor throw a scorpion at him when he expects an egg for breakfast, nor endanger his life by giving him a snake!

Yeshua is driving home a point that he considered very important: God has a good eye, and the more we come to realise that, the better will be our faith.

Many have used this passage to teach that when we ask God for the Holy Spirit, He won't give us a demon instead. The next few verses confirm this application (verses 14-20). Here, Yeshua is accused of using the power of Beelzebub to cast out demons. The controversy, it appears, hasn't changed in 2000 years — both the question, will you receive a snake or a fish when you ask for the Holy Spirit, and by what power are the miracles and acts of deliverance performed? Yeshua provides the answer to both.

Even if it weren't scriptural to ask God for spiritual gifts, it would still be 100 percent contrary to God's nature to allow the seeker to be filled with a demon power, or become empowered with an occultic gift, provided one has come to God in sincere faith in Him. He doesn't say, 'Ha! Because you have presumptuously asked for something my Word doesn't promise you, I will allow you to receive a snake instead! That will teach you!' However, there are other aspects to this which we'll discuss in a bit.

two kingdoms...

But the evangelicals aren't the only ones concerned about miracles being performed through the power of Beelzebub. It is still discussed to this day in some rabbinical circles. Some rabbinical literature describes Yeshua as a magician who went unusually deep into what later became known as Kabbalah, and, at one point, inscribed the Divine Name into his thigh, and so empowered, flew over the Holy Temple. A prominent rabbi of that day reverted to a similar method so as to fly up after him and pull him back down to earth. This would have represented, to them, a misuse of divine power inherent in the Torah scriptures and the Name of God — or something like the 'dark side of the force'.

The passage in Luke 11:14-28 probably accents the only other major difference between Rabbinical Judaism and New Testament theology, apart from the issue of Yeshua being Messiah — that of the actual nature of the kingdom of darkness.¹³

The rabbinical view of the person of Satan is probably best described by the scenario painted for us in the book of Job, and in I Kings 22:11-19. There, for the lack of more information, we are left to believe that Satan is one of God's angels responsible for bringing about the negative aspects, or the dark side of God's will. That's what he's believed to be according to rabbinical tradition.

The Old Testament is very sketchy when presenting Satan. Perhaps, more specific than the above passages are Isaiah 14:12-21, Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Daniel 10:13. Even there, the identity of the subject as actually being Satan, is only by inference by the fact that it couldn't possibly be talking about a human, but rather, an angel or spirit being. One of the passages refers to him as a Cherub.

Why does the Old Testament say so little about Satan? Probably for two reasons:

1. Because that's all the attention he deserves. Perhaps it's us who make too big a thing about him — especially when even the New Testament doesn't give us all that much information about him — only that he's God's enemy.

2. Because the Old Testament describes the world without the kingdom of God — except where it is prophesied as part of the future. Only in the New Testament do we begin to see two starkly contrasting kingdoms, the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Satan. In the Old Testament, we don't have the kingdom of God as a present reality, but only God's covenant with Israel through Abraham, Moses, David and others. Those who responded in faith were citizens in *advance* as it were, but it was seen as a future reality. Now that it's a *present* reality, there is more reason to describe Satan's kingdom in more detail, because now, it helps us better understand what God's kingdom is — where Satan's kingdom has been overthrown, or pushed back through Messiah's authority.¹⁴

13 Even though we only discuss the nature of Satan here, the rabbis also differ on the issue of original sin. I think it's proper to classify both of these points under the general teaching, 'Kingdom of Darkness'.

14 It's not our purpose here to provide a full description of the kingdom of God, but because of the confusing number of

The passage we're looking at is a foundational passage in describing Satan's power as a definite kingdom in opposition to the kingdom of light that Yeshua came to usher in. Therefore, He says, it would be illogical to think that demons were being forcibly cast out by Beelzebub himself, as that would go against his agenda — he *isn't*, after all, the administrator of God's 'dark side' — whereas if it's by God that demons are being driven out, then that's proof that the kingdom of God is being established in opposition to Satan's kingdom.

Some rabbis have described this point of view as 'Dualism', meaning that we believe, not in one God in control of the universe, but rather, God as representing good, and Satan representing evil. Just going by the way we often emphasise Satan's power and activity, one would easily arrive at that conclusion.

God's infinite wisdom...

To understand why Satan seems to have so much leeway, or why the situation looks, to us, like two opposing powers controlling the universe, we need to realise that God is infinite, not only in power, but also in wisdom. We discussed already, how God is so great and infinite He can allow us to make our own choices and still be in control. The other side of that is, Satan has enmeshed himself so thoroughly into God's creation with the notion that it would be impossible for God to judge Satan and destroy him without also judging and destroying all of creation, including man. Of course, if God used only His power, He could easily and utterly destroy Satan with a flick of a finger, but that would also destroy humanity and everything else that's under the control of the kingdom of darkness. God simply won't do it that way, because He is a Father who sees His children with a good eye.

It seemed to Satan, therefore, and to everyone else, that he had God in checkmate, but he didn't. It's as though God knew all along that it's a three-dimensional chess game, and Satan didn't. God is not only infinite in power, but also in wisdom. He knows loopholes for everything, and knows of physical and spiritual laws Satan never knew existed — and, He doesn't even have to scratch His head to think of them!

As we said in the other chapter, the cross is the prime example of that wisdom. It's the defining symbol of the New Covenant, and it's God's ultimate weapon that has already utterly destroyed Satan's legal grip on the universe and on humanity.¹⁵ It continues to be the tool by which those with faith in God's 'good eye' enforce that victory in the practical areas of their own lives and spheres of influence.

It's through the cross that the 'strong man' is bound (verses 21-23), and his goods are plundered — 'his goods' meaning primarily, the souls of people.

That was Yeshua's task at that given moment, and it's our task now — restoring lives by plundering the strong man's house, and leading his prisoners out into the kingdom of light.

repossession...

But why do some people seem to end up back in the strong man's house in an even worse state than before? Why do a lot of churches and Christian homes look like even tighter prisons than the original strong man's house? Why do people, having had demons cast out, or sickness healed, seem to end up more bound up than before?

teachings that now exist, it may be helpful to know that my belief is probably closest to that of John Wimber. The reader could refer to our cartoon illustrated teaching *The Happy Kingdom* for further reference.

¹⁵ Even then, Satan only represents a small part of the reason the cross was necessary. The main reason was *sin*. The cross was the method by which God's attribute of mercy could be fully expressed in complete harmony with His attribute of justice. Satan was defeated in the process because sin was his only foothold of control over people's lives — only his foothold, mind you. Satan doesn't even own exclusive rights to sin. Man has enough of that without Satan's help!

There, I hope that deals with the question of dualism, and thanks to the rabbinical community for bringing it up. It helps bring balance to our teachings.

That question could have been in the minds of many of the people, causing them to wonder if it were, after all, by the power of Beelzebub that demons were cast out. That could be why many in the Jewish community, today, *still* think that way regarding Christians; or why many Evangelicals think that way regarding Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Have they come to Yeshua expecting a fish, and received a snake instead?

No, Yeshua explained (verses 24-26). When a demon comes out of a person, it will eventually look for a chance to return — with seven more.

So what's the remedy?

Yeshua was just about to answer that question when a woman gave vent to her gratitude by spontaneously crying out, 'Blessed is the womb that gave birth to you!' (verses 27-28)

Yeshua's answer to her was also the answer to the problem of 're-possession': 'Far more blessed are those who *hear the word of God and do it.*'

The first question we must ask when someone seems to have lapsed into their old bondage, or seems to have received something other than a gift of the Spirit is, '*Has he or she been hearing the word of God and doing it?*' If not, as Yeshua said in a different context, they're like the man who built his house on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). We're not just talking about cases of actual demon possession, but I believe any relapse back into a previous bondage or bad habit falls under this category. (It's the word of God, you remember from the last chapter, that helps us distinguish God from our imaginary friend. God won't give you a snake for a fish, but I can make no such guarantee about your imaginary friend.)

What Yeshua says about those who *have* been hearing the word of God and doing it, is, they are more blessed than those who simply enjoy a privileged position, such as that of being Yeshua's own mother! Not everyone can be in a place of authority, or be the key person in some great turning point of history, or even write a book (like your own dear Robby); but *anyone* can listen as the word of God is spoken forth, and do it! In doing so, they get the greater blessing! God has a good eye, not for the lucky few who manage to be at the right place at the right time, but on *all* who will simply respond to however little or much of the word of God that has come their way.

God has a good eye, and everything Yeshua said and did was a demonstration of that fact.

the sign...

Somehow, there were *still* those who insisted that Yeshua show them a sign (verses 29-32). Why would they do that when Yeshua was already doing so many miracles?

Does that seem so strange to you? Then let's ask the question in a different way: When an excited woman gives a public testimony of a healing received at an evangelistic healing meeting, why doesn't the world sit up and take notice? Often, only those close to the situation are convinced that it's obviously a miracle. If it's someone you don't know, there's always the possibility that they were paid off to testify, or to pretend they were sick in the first place. Maybe the whole wheelchair section was packed with perfectly healthy strangers from out of town!

Then, there were probably examples sited then, just as now, of those who got healed and delivered, but ended up with the same sickness they started out with, or more bound than ever, as we saw above.

Also, many of the miracles happened in out-of-the-way places, and by the time word of them reached Jerusalem, it was regarded as hear-say. When Yeshua fed the 5000, there were no representatives of the Sanhedrin present to take official note of the fact — only Gallileans, whom nobody trusted.

That was just it, wasn't it! The miracles all happened to the wrong people, like the Gallileans, or to publicans and sinners. Either that or they happened in the synagogue on *Shabbat*! How can a miracle of healing be of God if it's performed on *Shabbat*? How can healings be from God if they happen to people who are obviously sinners who don't deserve it? How can speaking in tongues be a gift of the Holy Spirit if it's falling on *Roman Catholics*? Why isn't it falling on our own denominational leaders

and seminary professors? C'mon, Yeshua, show us a real *sign*!

God isn't in the habit of simply showing signs and wonders just to prove His existence, nor just to prove one fact or another (though He has done that on occasion). Signs attest to His *character*. God is a Father who has a *good eye*. He has compassion on the sick and oppressed, so He heals them and delivers them. He has compassion on the hungry, so He moved on Yeshua to break the bread and fish and feed 5000 people. The Father has a good eye on all. People in out of the way places, whom city people take with a grain of salt, are of no less value to Him than the rich influential city people. If you're out to prove to God what a valuable *asset* you are to Him, He may just ignore you and go for those hungering for a *relationship* with Him, even if they're the dregs of society.

That's just what His signs prove, and to truly perceive the signs, you have to know God as having a good eye. God has unlimited power, yes, but He's far more interested in us knowing His love. From there, we come to know His power, not so much as one of His attributes, but as a *function* of His unlimited love towards us.

Of course, every child admires a muscular athlete who can lift 1000 pounds, but wouldn't children much rather have a father who uses his strength to protect and provide for his family?

The signs are there, but to see them, you must have a good eye. For those who realised their need of the Father's good eye to them, the Father's love was as a light set on a stand (verse 30).

lighting the lamp...

Now, we're up to the verse on the good eye. To have light, you must have a good eye, because the eye is the lamp of the body. With that light, you can see ever so much more. In verse 52, Yeshua calls it the 'key to knowledge'. It's the key to knowing God, and it's the key to faith. To have great faith to move mountains, you simply need a good eye. Only a good eye will clearly see why a mountain needs to be moved in the first place.

How does one come by a good eye?

By two steps, but they can be worded in a number of different ways. The simplest wording is, 1, *repent*, and 2, *believe* (Mark 1:15). Another way of putting it is, 1, *confess Yeshua as Lord*, and 2, *believe He's raised from the dead* (Romans 10:9). Yet another is, 1, *fear God*, and 2, *worship Him* (Revelation 14:7). In this book we've generally worded it, 1, by the *cross of Yeshua*, and 2, *knowing the Father's good eye*.

But, you ask, aren't all these ways of leading sinners to salvation? Certainly! But tell me, after you became a Christian and began walking with Yeshua, did you find you had run out of reasons to repent? Did you find it no longer necessary to use your faith? Walking the life of the believer requires as much (if not more) repentance and faith as the initial born again experience. But we'll word it like we've been doing:

1. by the cross — on which Yeshua was wounded for our wounds and died the death that was ours. This is a vital step, as it is usually because of a wound inflicted in the past that people find it hard to enter into an 'I-you' relationship, and from that time on, have allowed their eye to go bad. They have been hurt by a relationship in the past, and they don't want to be hurt again.

This is a very sensitive issue to God. Yeshua said in Matthew 18:6, it would be better for one to have a millstone tied around one's neck and be cast into the sea than to wound a little one. The reason for that is, once wounded, the little one is virtually doomed to a life of darkness, and fear of relationship that would grate on the spot where the wound was inflicted. Yeshua then went on to die the death of the cross, and to be wounded for those very wounds.

But coming by way of the cross is not just acknowledging the fact that Yeshua died, but also responding to His command, 'To be my follower, you must say "no" to yourself, take up your cross and

follow me' (Matthew 16:14). Yeshua said this quite some time before actually going to the cross Himself, so it gave people a bit of a shock when He said it.

To us, 'cross' has come to mean the emblem of Christianity. Sometimes, crosses are gold plated and have gems inlaid. To us, the above statement has come to mean, 'Take up your gem studded emblems of Christendom, and join the parade!' Yeshua's pupils, on the other hand, were jolted to their senses by the word 'cross', because to them, it was anything but a pretty ornament. The *Complete Jewish Bible*¹⁶ uses the word, 'execution stake' in place of 'cross'. Some may take exception to that wording, but at least it gives us the same jolt as 'cross' gave Yeshua's original audience.

Also involved in Yeshua's command, is saying, 'no' to yourself. That may mean a very brave step for those who have been severely wounded, because it means saying 'no' to the inclination to put up defences.¹⁷ It means putting yourself into a position of vulnerability and opening up to Yeshua like you've never opened up to anyone before since the day the wounding happened, and then, identifying with Him in His death for you.

He was wounded to death. You may *feel* like you died, but you haven't died yet, so let His death be your death from the wounds inflicted on you, because it is from those very wounds that He died.

Even if you don't remember the wound you received, you can still open up to Him in this way. This may also mean opening yourself up to whomever God has sent along to help you through this step.

All of the above is what is involved in *repentance*, which means turning around and going the other direction. Saying 'no' to yourself is doing just that. But that's not all. God doesn't leave you in suspense. He didn't only say, 'repent', but also 'believe'. Believe that having died, He rose again, and that also means *your* resurrection. Not only does He command us to say 'no' to ourselves, but he also invites us to...

2. know the Father's good eye — Trust God like you've never trusted anyone before since that day you were hurt, and enter into an 'I-you' relationship with Him. If you don't know how, simply begin *worshipping* Him. Worship is basically offering yourself to Him, acknowledging you are at the end of yourself, and have nothing apart from Him. Sing, or pray in whatever form of prayer you want, but do it *to Him*, as though you were looking into His eyes. Of course, you can't imagine what He looks like, but you can do it as though you were speaking on the phone to someone you've never seen.

Practice doing that. If you're in a place where people can help pray for you, this can be of great help. Don't be afraid you'll receive a snake instead of a fish, because you are coming in obedience to your Father. You are coming by way of the cross. If anyone has received a wrong spirit by the laying on of hands, it's because they've not been by way of the cross, and are not in the attitude of truly seeking to receive the word of God, so as to do it; but probably just to have some sort of ecstatic experience — perhaps from their imaginary friend. But you have no need to fear as long as you are truly coming to meet God on *His* terms.

By worshipping Him, and exercising your faith in His good eye, your eye will be healed. Sometimes it happens all at once but sometimes it happens gradually. But don't worry. Just continue until the healing comes. But don't stop there. Keep communing with Him every day, as often as you can. He loves to have you around, because He has a good eye for you!

¹⁶ *Complete Jewish Bible*, Translated by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc. U.S.A., Israel, 1998

¹⁷ The defences we tend to put up, such as shying away from close or potentially painful relationships, really are not an adequate protection anyway. The only real protection is the armour of God (Eph 6:10-20) which entails applying the life of the cross to our daily experience.

Wearing the Whole Armour of God

A teaching on how to actually put on and maintain the armour of God

By Robby Charters

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introduction

To get anywhere in such a competitive world, we need a whole arsenal of strategies and protection. Even with a fool-proof recipe for success, we never knows where we'll get hit next. What's the competition up to? What have we overlooked? What unpleasant surprises lie in wait around the next corner? This is a fact of life in the world of business, in politics, diplomacy and all out war between nations.

In fact, all of life is a war.

The spiritual world is no exception. When one sees all the potential dangers that await the unsuspecting believer, one is tempted to shudder. All those temptations! The traps! People putting curses on Christians! And then there are all the new teachings -- are they of God? Are they just fads? Are they cults? Will they end up in the funny-farm or in a mass suicide? How do we keep from being led into error? What about this or that famous minister that was caught in adultery? What about brother and sister so-and-so with the "ideal marriage" that just got a divorce? With so many around us "biting the dust", how can we hope to make it?

The Bible makes no secret of the fact that the devil and his hordes are looking for every opportunity to get at us. Peter warns us to "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8).

It seems like there are so many ways for the devil to get in, one couldn't hope to cover all the points. I'm reminded of a circus performer I once saw on television, who was twirling plates on sticks he had stuck into the ground. There was enough springiness to the sticks, so that they would jiggle, and keep the plates spinning for a while; but he had to mind so many of these that when he got towards the last of them, he had to rush back and give the first few sticks a jiggle. Then a plate would fall off a stick over in another spot he couldn't run to in time. The entertainment was seeing him run back and forth trying to keep all the plates spinning. I'm sure that many people who saw that were reminded of their own everyday lives.

Does our success as believers depend on our running around trying to keep up with all the spinning plates?

When the Corinthian believers started getting interested in so many distractions, Paul told them, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). Elsewhere, we are told to test the spirits to see if a bad one is trying to deceive us. I John 4:2 says that any spirit that does not say, "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," is not from God. I Cor 12:3 tells us if they say "Jesus is accursed" they're not from God.

All methods of testing the spirits focus on Jesus!

So, there's really only one point to cover -- Jesus. Who is Jesus to you? How important is He to you? Just making Him the focus of everything covers all the other points!

That's why so much of Satan's activity is centred around trying to get our eyes off of Jesus. It's only

then that he can truly destroy us.

There are so many ways Satan uses to take our focus off of Him, that practically the whole New Testament is taken up just telling us more about Jesus so we can better keep our focus on Him. In the end, John tells us in his first epistle (3:3), "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." It's focusing on Him that changes us into His image.

Focusing on Jesus both protects us, and accomplishes the ultimate goal for which we were called in the first place.

In Ephesians 6, Paul lists six pieces of armour. There are six, yes, but they all focus on Jesus. They each represent a different aspect of who Jesus is to us and in us. To wear the whole armour of God is to focus on Jesus. Each piece helps us to defend ourselves against Satan's wiles, while at the same time, advancing ourselves even further towards being more like Christ. We can also see some of the methods Satan will use to try to bring us down, and how each piece of armour will protect us from that.

So there's no need to be bewildered about there being so many pieces of armour to keep track of. Once Jesus becomes our focus, they all become one. In fact, we'll also see that it's much easier to keep each individual piece on when we have our whole armour on. It's only when we have just one or two pieces on that they'll become difficult to maintain.

Now let's look at the passage, and go through it point by point:

Eph 6:10-20 (NKJV) -- Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -- ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

who is our enemy?

First, let's look at who our enemy is, who he isn't, and at what his weapons are.

Verse 12 tells, we *don't* wrestle against flesh and blood, but rather, against about four levels of spiritual powers. It's not our purpose here to go into detail about each of the four levels. Let's just say that the highest level are the powers over whole nations, and Satan himself; and the lowest are the little ones that simply perch on our shoulders and point out to us how fun it would be to forget our spiritual life for just a while, and "have some fun"; or to gossip about someone; or just dwell on how bad someone's been to us.

Some of the ones in between are the ones involved in occult activity, supernatural curses, masquerading as spirits of the dead and so on. It's this kind we often think of as spooks in some

haunted house or other that would give us "goose bumps" or make our hair stand up. They are all dangerous, to be sure, but more dangerous than those that make our hair stand up, are the ones that make our tongues stand up -- as it were -- in slander and gossip. It's these, that are expert in making *us* a snare to *others*.

Indeed, the New Testament focuses a lot more on this area, than in table lifting, charms and curses. A parallel scripture to the one we read above is found in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians:

II Cor 10:3-6 (NKJV) -- For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Just as Ephesians 6 said, our war is in the spirit, not in the flesh. Our weaponry -- the armour of God which we are about to look at piece by piece -- is designed to pull down strongholds. What do these strongholds consist of? Poltergeists and vampires?

No. Arguments, ideas and thoughts are what Paul is stressing here. Even disobedience.

To be sure, the more occult and spooky aspects will play a role in spiritual warfare, but the more destructive aspects are what happens in our mind, and in our conversation -- thoughts dwelt on and words spoken. In the context of II Corinthians, there were ideas going around, and things said that were causing disunity in the body of believers in Corinth, and preventing people from having a clear focus on Jesus. Paul was prepared to use spiritual authority to put a stop to these things.

Words and thoughts can be very destructive. Thoughts can be directly from Satan and his demons, from our own human nature, or they can have their source in what others say. What someone says can have a profound influence over another person -- whether for the good or for the bad. All this, we need to be aware of for two reasons: to be careful not to allow ourselves to become tools of Satan in speaking words destructive against others; and to be able to cope when others speak destructive words to or about us. The latter aspect, we will cover in detail as we look at each piece of armour. They, along with thoughts, and yes, occult activity, are among the things that the full armour of God protects us from. Without that protection, they will hinder our focus on Jesus.

It's when our focus has been taken off of Jesus, that we see just how easy it is for us to speak words of criticism, slander, gossip and anger that are so destructive to others. By just one slip of the tongue, we say something horrible about someone else, or respond insensitively to someone close to us, and ruin their whole day, if not their life. James chapter 3 tells us all about how deadly the unwatched tongue can be.

It's so important to recognise that Satan's favourite weapon against us is *us*! Some of the deepest wounds we receive in the fight of faith are inflicted by our own brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, they are the ones that hurt us the most, because we didn't expect someone so close, or someone we had so much hope in to say what they did. But remember how easy it is for us to speak those very same words against others in *our* unguarded moments.

By using our words against others, and using the criticism and slander of our own brothers and sisters against us; Satan's strategy is not only to inflict deep wounds, from which he hopes we'll never recover; but also to divide us, and keep the church defenceless against his own kingdom through our disunity.

Rick Joyner sees the battle of the end time as something like the American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln was one who was truly qualified to lead during this time, because he knew that he wasn't

fighting an "enemy", but his own countrymen. He carefully refrained from depicting the other side as "evil" in the eyes of his citizens, even when such a declaration could have rallied his side to a quicker victory. The victory would have been quicker, perhaps, but the healing of the nation, afterwards, would quite possibly have never occurred.

We need to maintain this same attitude towards our brothers and sisters in Christ, even when they are slandering us, and talking about what heretics we are. I'm not simply speaking in terms of people with similar persuasions as ourselves i.e. those with a Charismatic type experience (or not, if that's the case); but also those whose *only* belief known to be held in common with us is that salvation is through Jesus Christ dying and rising from the dead. The only way we can maintain such an attitude is to keep focused on Jesus through wearing our whole suit of armour. That's when His forgiveness and love will freely flow through us to them.

Our battle, indeed, is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers that influence the words that are being spoken against us. The armour is there to protect us from being wounded by those words; and to enable us to stand against the spiritual powers that inspired the words; but not to hurt people of flesh and blood whom Satan has taken captive to use as the launching point for those words.

Now, let's look at each of the pieces of our armoury, piece by piece.

the belt of truth

Truth, in New Testament Greek usage has three applications :

1. Truth as the opposite of falsehood;
2. Truth in the heart, as the opposite of hypocrisy; and...
3. Ultimate Truth, as found in God's word. Also, we could note Jesus's saying, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6); and "Your *Word* is *Truth*" (John 17:17; Jesus is also the Word, John 1:1).

So, which meaning applies to the belt of truth?

All three, of course.

We initially receive the Truth when we receive Jesus. We also receive Truth when we read His Word, the Bible. That is, we *read* the truth. The Holy Spirit, if we let Him, will cause that truth to sink in and become the Truth that abides in us (II John 1:2). That, again, is how we focus on Jesus, who is Truth.

When the Truth is in us through the Word and the Spirit, then our habits begin to line up with the Truth, and our words and actions also begin to express truth.

There are some who go through an exercise every morning called "putting on the armour". They confess each piece, saying, "I now put on the belt of truth, I now put on the breastplate of righteousness..." and so on.

We will discuss some helpful aspects to this exercise later on, but if you haven't been reading the Bible and allowing the Holy Spirit to apply it in your life, then no amount of confession it is going to actually fasten the belt of truth around you! You put on the belt of truth by receiving the Truth, focusing on Him who is Truth, and that Truth results in you being a transparent, truthful person.

As you begin to read the Bible, first, pray, "Lord, let these words You spoke through Your prophets be Your words to me right now. I open my heart to you." Then, act as though it's Jesus speaking to you, or else read it as though it's a letter from God to you. Be ready to repent of any untruth that the Truth of God's Word uncovers.

How much truth do we need to be fully girded with the belt of truth?

As much truth as God has revealed to you. He reveals His truth to us in three ways:

1. The Bible (as we've seen);

2. Through the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts; and...
3. Through relationships in the Body of Christ.

The Bible, of course, is the most sure way. As the Holy Spirit speaks to us, we can know that it's truly Him, because it lines up with God's Word. In that way, the belt of truth protects us from error from the wrong spirit.

Words through the Holy Spirit, or words of correction can come to us through friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. Any personal prophecy should be confirmed, both by the Word of God, and by an inner witness through the Holy Spirit's personal dealing with us. Again, that's the belt of truth protecting us from manipulation by someone who's out to control us.

Also, being open to receive correction by open-mindedly listening to others, is a way to make sure our belt of truth is fastened, because we are then open to all channels of truth. Even those who speak out of a critical attitude can have something to say. Even if it's half-truth, the Word and the Spirit can help us discern which half is truth.

After all, when Jesus said, "Judge not...don't look for a speck in your brother's eye when there's a log in yours," he was only speaking to the judgemental critic, not to the one on the receiving end. In other words, He *didn't* say, "If someone with a log in their eye approaches you, don't listen." If there's truth in what they're saying, then we're responsible before God for having heard it.

The more open we are to truth coming from all three sources, the better protected we are. The sincerity of heart (or absence of hypocrisy) that would enable us to receive from one less worthy than ourselves, protects us from pride. Satan has fewer options to use against us.

It's interesting that truth is described by Paul here as a belt. If you think a moment, what's the most embarrassing thing you can think of that could happen in public? Among the most embarrassing, would you say, is your trousers falling down? What would cause your trousers to fall? The lack of a belt, of course!

Ask yourself again, what is the most embarrassing thing that could happen to one in public ministry -- one whose words carry weight, and is known for high moral standards?

To be caught with his or her pants down (not that Paul actually had that modern English pun in mind)! To be shown up in a moment of hypocrisy, or caught in an immoral act. Those who have lost the edge of truth in their personal lives have made themselves vulnerable to this kind of attack. All Satan has to do is to wait for the moment when the battle is at its hottest, and then aim an arrow of accusation at the spot where the belt ought to be, and then, down come the trousers!

That attack comes in the form of an accusation. There are two kinds of accusations: the true ones and the false ones. Along with the true ones should be included, the half truths.

A totally false accusation could change public opinion about us, but won't hurt us if we know in our hearts we are right and honest before God -- so long as our breastplate of righteousness is on. That, we'll discuss in the next section.

A true, or a half true accusation hurts when we've been trying to hide something. Our untruth in the matter suddenly comes to light, and we've been wounded. In the case of a half-truth, we're left forever on the defensive, arguing against the half of the accusation that's untrue, while on the other hand, covering-up to hide from the half that is true. It's like holding one's trousers up with one hand and fighting with the other. As far as Satan is concerned, we've been incapacitated.

However, if in our complete transparency before God and man, we've confessed the point of wrong doing, or admitted to the weakness, then there's not much point in Satan trying to aim for that part to begin with. He may aim, instead, for the part covered by the breastplate of righteousness.

the breastplate of righteousness

Perhaps we could say that righteousness is the view one takes of oneself. Many of us probably view

ourselves as being pretty good people. Others may view us as not quite so good as we think we are. Changing our view of ourselves from what we think, to the way others see us can be quite a trauma. On the other hand, those who don't know us very closely may admire us in some ways. Quite a lot depends on how we see ourselves -- whether we view ourselves from our own perspective, from that of our friends, from that of our critics, from that urged on us by our psychologist, or by our pastor, priest or rabbi. (There's another perspective we haven't mentioned yet -- by far the most important -- but we'll get to that in a moment.) That image could be that of a "good guy", "bad guy", "cool guy", "sugar daddy", "old windbag", "tightwad" or any of an endless number of designations.

It's very appropriate that this view of ourselves is described as a breastplate, because our self image is like a protective device. Most of us develop a view of ourselves we can live with, and we take comfort in that, when the going gets tough. Teachers, counsellors and other leaders are often seen trying to pinpoint some positive area in the lives of their pupils and councilors -- whether some ability, some natural good point or some accomplishment -- that they can use to rally their self-esteem.

All this can be good for us and build our confidence -- or break us in the end if that confidence is wrongly placed.

For Paul, it could have taken him a long ways. Here's what he had to say about himself (Phil 3:4-11):

⁴ ...If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul had it all together when he was functioning as a Pharisee. He was a high achiever no matter what way you look at it, and the achievements he lists here are definitely something to crow about. He was also born of a good family; elsewhere we read that he had a well known rabbi as a mentor; and scholars believe he was actually a member of the Sanhedrin, the great judicial council in Jerusalem that made many binding decisions that rabbis still go by to this day. According to the religious standard of righteousness -- or shall we say, from everyone else's point of view -- he was well ahead of everyone else. And yet, when he discovered the "righteousness which is from God by faith", he chose to disregard these accomplishments as though they were of no value at all!

Why? Because he suddenly caught a glimpse of himself from God's perspective. We can shuffle, rationalise and feel good about ourselves all we want, but in the end, it's only how God sees us that counts.

Paul found, that all the good points he could dig up about himself would only make a breastplate big enough to cover, say, his navel. Perhaps, if he moved it up a bit, and over to the left, he could wear it like a medal that war veterans wear to boost their self esteem. After all we *are* talking about warfare here, aren't we.

But in a real battle, a medal is of absolutely no use whatsoever. Satan will never aim for the medal.

He'll aim for the part of you that isn't covered. He knows how to get around every single positive mental attitude there is. In fact, he even inspired some of them himself!

What you need, is a breastplate that's big enough to cover your whole chest area. For that, you need the alternative approach to righteousness that Paul found -- the "righteousness which is from God by faith".

The thing about this righteousness, is that it requires no achieving at all! In fact, to make full use of it (which in a war one must), Paul found he had to disregard all his old achievements as though they meant nothing.

Get rid of those old medals. On your breastplate, there's no place to pin them!

But not only did he disregard all his achievements he gained as a Pharisee; he chose to forget even his accomplishments as an apostle:

*...¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind** and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.*

He chose to forget the past -- both the good things and the bad -- and only regarded the righteousness he received through faith in Jesus. The old just wouldn't do.

Not only is our own righteousness insufficient to protect us from Satan's attacks; it won't even get us to heaven! We can rationalise all we want about how good we are; but from God's perspective, we all deserved to die because of our sin. We, with our twentieth century rationalisation, can insist all day long that a loving God would never punish anyone by sending them to Hell. Just one small glimpse of yourself from God's point of view will convince you that God's standard of justice is the only one, and that we do, indeed, deserve Hell. Of course, I can't give you that glimpse here. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. I pray He will.

But not only is God just; He is also full of love and mercy. He went to the ultimate length to provide a way out for us. He sent his only Son to become the target of all the consequences of our sin.

When Jesus died on the cross, an exchange took place, as II Corinthians 5:21 says: *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

When we decide to turn our lives around and accept what He's done for us (His death and His resurrection from the dead), we automatically gain that righteousness.

No longer do we have to worry if we're good enough for God, or if our past record of wrongdoing will keep us from any of God's blessings. All that has been put on Jesus in exchange for His righteousness. He became sin with our sin -- we become righteous with His righteousness. There's absolutely nothing we can do to improve on that.

When we wear that righteousness as a breastplate by focusing on Him, God sees us as though He were looking at Jesus. Everything that was a part of our old life; all the bad things and our failures, all of our achievements, everything is forgotten -- as though it never happened.

Remember, that's not only our failures, but also our achievements.

It's important that our self-image become based, not on what we've done, not on what we always thought we were, not on what we want to become someday, not on what psychology textbooks say we are, nor on what other people say we are; but on how God sees us in Christ. Our righteousness in Christ means we've been accepted by God in the same way as He accepts His own Son. We must learn to accept ourselves on the same basis on which God accepts us. As we learn this, the way other people see

us will mean less and less to us.

Why is this important?

Because that's as far as the breastplate of righteousness will protect us. Where we still cling to our *own* view of ourselves, that's where the breastplate of righteousness *doesn't* protect us.

Here, I'm not talking about avoiding Hell and getting into Heaven when we die. The fact that we *have* that righteousness will get us to heaven. Here, we're talking about actually *using* that righteousness to protect us from Satan's attacks -- how a self image based on His righteousness acts like a breastplate.

Let's say I'm out shopping for some groceries. I'm wheeling my grocery trolley down an aisle trying to compare the price on two different brands of baked beans. Then, I hear two people just on the other side of the row of shelves having a conversation, and I realise they are friends of mine.

One of them is saying, "You know, Robby just isn't as sharp as he thinks he is."

"That's right," says the other. "Half of the stuff he writes -- it just bores me to death!"

"Yes, he's out of touch, somehow."

"And that hair-doo of his. Why! He's just an over-grown hippie!"

As I carry my bag of baked beans home, I mutter to myself, "Out of touch, am I? An over-grown hippie am I?"

That's all I can think of for all that day, and the rest of the week. The next time I see those two people in church, I just grunt and look the other way. "Huh! What does an 'over-grown hippie' have to say to you!"

When it's time to get down to some writing, I just sigh, and say, "What's the use -- I'm just an out-of-touch over-grown hippie. My stuff just bores people."

What has happened?

I've been hit with one of the enemy's arrows, and I was wounded because I didn't have my breastplate of righteousness on.

If I did, my focus wouldn't be on my writing ability, nor how in-touch I am, nor my smart hair-doo. It would be on who I am in God's eyes.

I would be so taken up with what the Creator of the universe thinks of me that it wouldn't make any difference to me that my friends think I'm less than top-notch.

That is, what the Creator of the universe thinks of *me* -- not my writing ability, or my looks. My writing ability is nice, of course, but I must realise that God doesn't love "Robby, the great author", or "Robby, the spell-binding Bible teacher". He doesn't even love "Robby the missionary" or "Robby with oh-so-much potential".

Who does God love? He loves just plain old Robby -- with or without any abilities and accomplishments.

Wearing the breastplate of righteousness is keeping our focus on His love for us.

We are protected by our breastplate to the extent that we accept ourselves as God sees us without adding anything of our own achievements to it, nor subtracting anything due to past or present failure. It's a place of humility, to be sure, because we don't get to show anything off except for what Jesus is in us.

So how do we maintain our breastplate?

The same way we maintain the belt of Truth. Again, all the pieces of armour are one -- only this time, we receive the truth specifically regarding our righteousness in Christ.

One excellent Bible portion that will enhance your understanding of our righteousness, is the book of Ephesians -- especially the first few chapters. Just take your time reading it. Go over some of the verses many times, focusing on Jesus as you do. That will do something for your inner self.

Another way is to find scriptures in the New Testament -- especially Paul's epistles -- that contain

the phrase, "in Christ", or "in Him", or "through Christ" etc. These verses will help you mould your view of yourself into the view God has of you. Again, quite a few of these are in Ephesians:

*1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**,⁴ just as He chose us **in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons **by Jesus Christ** to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted **in the Beloved**.⁷ **In Him** we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed **in Himself**,¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things **in Christ**, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--**in Him**.¹¹ **In Him** also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...*

The above is just a small sample.

Another point about maintaining your breastplate of righteousness is to remain in fellowship with Jesus. To be in fellowship with Him requires transparency. That brings us back to the belt of truth again, but, as we said, it's all the same thing. Like we said earlier, it's easier to maintain each individual piece of armour when we've got it all on.

Despite the fact we are "in Christ", we still make mistakes. Sometimes, *big* mistakes -- sometimes falling into sin in a *big* way. But if we're transparent before God, instead of insisting that everything's just fine, we can immediately pick right back up where we left off.

I John 1:5-10 says:

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Notice what verses 8, 9 and 10 say about transparency. According to verse 9, it's as we confess our sin, rather than trying to hide it, that we are cleansed from whatever unrighteousness that would knock our breastplate out of kilter. That also keeps us in fellowship, because as we remain transparent before Him, we're in the light, and thus (according to verse 7) in fellowship with Jesus.

So, when you slip up (and it doesn't matter how many times you've already slipped up), just say, "Lord, I've slipped up. I've done ...(name the sin)... With Your help, I turn away from this sin right now. Please forgive me and cleanse me from my unrighteousness." Verse 9 promises that He is faithful

and just to forgive. Then, fellowshiping with Him in the light (verse 7) will give you the strength to overcome that tendency to sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, *cleanses*" us from that tendency.

If, for some reason, you think He won't forgive, or He's giving you the silent treatment, just read that verse again. "He is faithful and just to forgive..." That means that if you are truly being open and transparent before Him, as His Word (i.e. Truth) says, He *does* forgive you. He is the Truth -- there's no question of Him lying -- so you can rest assured, just because His Word said it, that you are forgiven, and back in fellowship.

That's how you keep your breastplate on.

the gospel shoes

It's good to look again at Paul's wording in his description of this piece (vs. 15):

*...having shod your **feet** with the preparation of the **gospel** (good news) of **peace**...*

This is a direct reference to a favourite verse of Paul's -- Isaiah 52:7:

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the **feet** of him who brings **good news**, who proclaims **peace**, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"*

He also quotes this verse in Romans 10, in a passage in which he is talking about evangelism -- especially to the Jewish community:

¹⁴ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

*¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the **feet** of those who preach the **gospel of peace**, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

All of the above gives us a wide breadth of application -- from missionary evangelism in other lands (over the mountains), to sharing to Jewish people who their Messiah is, to simply bringing hope and comfort to fellow believers by reminding them that "your God reigns", and that His kingdom is coming very shortly.

Not everyone can be a missionary; not everyone can speak to people of various ethnic backgrounds with the same effectiveness; and not everyone can teach, preach or bring comfort in quite the same way. But everyone has a gift of the Holy Spirit -- perhaps two or three.

To try to do something for which you don't have a gift, is sometimes like running over a mountain barefoot. You might bring the message, but you'll be wincing in so much pain from your sore feet, that if the people don't listen very carefully, they might think you're talking about some sort of torment -- not peace. And your feet will end up not looking very beautiful!

Without this piece of armour, it's easy for Satan to confuse us with all kinds of situations that are out of our depth. Once we are wounded in the feet, it could be a long time before we again venture out to attempt any more work of ministry.

That's why Jesus made sure His disciples didn't go anywhere until they had put on their shoes:

Luke 24:49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Acts 1:8 "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth..."

The fact is, they didn't have to wait very long for the Holy Spirit to come, and what a difference it made!

Only 53 days earlier, Peter had showed that he most certainly *didn't* have his feet shod for *any* mountain-climbing. When there was an opportunity to state his belief of who the Prince of Peace was, he was so confused and turned around that he denied all knowledge of Jesus!

After that, he was indeed a wounded man. All self confidence had drained away completely. If it weren't for the fact that Jesus knew beforehand that Satan was about to "sift him like wheat" (Luke 22:31,32) and did some intense praying for him, Peter probably wouldn't have emerged from this experience at all! As it was, many of Jesus's words upon His resurrection were intended to heal those wounds (John 21:15-19).

Here, we see that words spoken at the right time, along with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, can heal us of Satan's attacks at points where we haven't been properly covered by the armour. Wounds are an inevitable fact of war, but as we focus on Jesus, healing comes. As it was, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell, Peter was the first one to stand up and announce the **good news of peace**, and proclaim to Israel, "Your God reigns!"

Upon that announcement, 3000 people repented and were baptised.

Some of you are probably wondering, "Where in the world do I find shoes like that?"

Look one more time at the passage in Romans 10:

¹⁴ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

*¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are **sent**?*

We get our shoes when we're *sent*. The disciples had to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, because it was He who would *send* them.

How are we sent?

How do we know when we've been sent?

We have to be in a position of hearing from God -- the same place Peter was when he was healed of his deep wounds in his soul, and then became empowered to preach. That place was the place of fellowship with Jesus, sitting on the beach around a fire with Jesus eating fish for breakfast, and then simply waiting quiet before the Lord until Pentecost came.

Focusing on Jesus; fellowshiping with Jesus; walking in the light as He is in the light: that's what the armour is all about.

Even though Jesus isn't here in bodily form, we have the Holy Spirit. When we worship God in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23) and begin to simply enjoy His presence, and that becomes the priority in our lives, then we learn how to work *with* God, not *for* Him. The work of ministry begins to come naturally.

That's the way Paul and Barnabas received their calling:

Acts 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers:

*Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they **ministered to the Lord** and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

It looks like what this group of prophets and teachers came together to do, was not prophecy, not ask for direction, but simply to minister to the Lord. It's while they were praising and worshipping Him, and enjoying His presence that the Holy Spirit singled out Barnabas and Saul for a special work.

Be careful not to miss the point here. Ministering to the Lord and focusing on Jesus is not simply a way of getting what we need from God. It is, in fact, *an end in itself*. It's the reason we were created. We were made to simply be friends with God.

Yes, the "gospel shoes" are to help us do the work of the Lord, but we must remember that we begin our work from a place of intimacy and friendship.

John 15:15 "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Once we start there, the rest becomes natural. We no longer go by a set method, but we work as one who understands the work, because we are working side by side with Jesus.

On the other hand, don't simply refrain from all ministry because you don't know your calling yet. If there are opportunities to join in, then join in. If a team is going out passing out leaflets, join them. If you have a chance to join with a ministry team going to another country, by all means, go along and see where you fit in. But do it with your heart open to Jesus, with the attitude that you're working *with* Him, not *for* Him. It's easy to do that when you're with a team, and the whole team is oriented that way. Or if the passenger sitting next to you on the bus looks like he needs new hope in his life, than look for a opportunity to share it with him. Often, it's when we try a few things like this that we "find our shoes". When you do, it won't seem like hard work, but like a pastime. Also, the more you do this, the more easily you'll hear His voice. Much more work of the ministry will get accomplished this way than by our being motivated by guilt or duty.

the helmet of salvation

If we look at the whole history of Paul's ministry, not only in the book of Acts but also in the Epistles, we can see that this passage on the armour of God was a teaching illustration he had probably been developing for quite some time -- at least since his second missionary journey, when he travelled to Corinth and wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. In this letter, we see the same illustration in a simpler form, probably just after he had thought it up, or after it was first given to him by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thess 5:8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

Calling the breastplate, "faith and love" isn't too far different from calling it "righteousness". After all, we make use of our breastplate of righteousness by basing our faith on the fact that we are the objects of God's love.

When we see the helmet as being the "hope of salvation", that also gives us a deeper understanding of what salvation is.

Salvation isn't just something that happened to us a long time ago (or, for some of us, not so long ago) when you repented and confessed Jesus to be your Lord. Salvation *began* with our being born again. Though we tend to think that salvation means being saved from Hell, the Bible concept goes far beyond that.

When we look at salvation from the Biblical standpoint, we're not talking about salvation from Hell (although it does include that), but rather, salvation from *sin*. It's a restoration process.

This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote to the Philippians:

Phil 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ;

Was Paul really telling them to fear and tremble at the possibility that they might die and go to Hell at any minute? No. He was exhorting them to be motivated by the fear of the Lord to allow His grace to do a complete work in their lives.

Because we tend to think of salvation as being from Hell, we try to motivate people to accept salvation by inducing a fear of Hell. The Bible never tells us to fear Hell, but to fear God. Anyone, through skilful presentation and PR work, can create a fear of Hell, but only the Holy Spirit can bring on the fear of the Lord. He convicts of sin, God hates sin, and fear of the Lord leads us through an ongoing process whereby we are delivered from our sins.

Earlier on in the epistle, he had said essentially the same thing:

1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

The fear of the Lord is the other side of our relationship with Him that we haven't looked at yet. We already saw that we are called to be His friends. All the while, we are also aware that He is a great and awesome God, the creator of the universe, and One who doesn't tolerate sin. He has been a loving and merciful God to us, but His other attribute is that of justice and holiness. Experiencing God in His attribute of justice is the "fear and trembling" aspect of our relationship with Him. That is the motivation to be diligent to allow God's grace to complete the work in us that He began the day we were born again.

We know that He's given us His Holy Spirit, and His Word to read and enjoy. We know we have an approach to Him any time we have a need. However, without the fear of the Lord, it's too easy to take all this for granted.

The Creator of the universe -- the God who is a consuming fire -- gave us these privileges for a specific reason. He expects these privileges to be used to their maximum benefit, so that we can receive from Him, and grow up to be what He called us to be. When the King invites you to supper, you don't just make *any old* excuse to not show up.

But we can also rest assured that when we do take advantage of our righteousness, of the belt of Truth and of His Holy Spirit's empowerment, we will be changed into His image. That is the hope of salvation.

Hope is looking forward to what's up ahead. What is up ahead is the "day of Jesus Christ" that Paul mentioned to the Philippians. That is the day that we expect the work to be completed that He began in us the day we were born again.

Paul said some more profound things about this "day of Jesus Christ" in his letter to the Romans (chapter 10):

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The final stage of our salvation is the "redemption of our body." That, according to this passage, is not only the longing of our spiritual nature, but of all nature as well. Throughout the New Testament, we see that this was the hope that kept everyone intensely motivated. In Titus, Paul calls it "The blessed Hope." Then, in this passage, we read that the Holy Spirit was given to us so that we could pray this hope through to reality.

We certainly do need the Holy Spirit's help in this. God help our ignorance! We've always thought that the second coming would just automatically happen one fine day when we were least expecting it. Peter didn't see it that way. He said it was up to us to *hasten* that day:

*II Pet 3:11 ...Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and **hastening** the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat*

If it's up to us to *hasten* that day -- the day God planned everything for since the beginning of the World -- don't you think that's cause for fear and trembling?

What we are looking forward to here is the end result of all our labours here on Earth. For that reason, we can be assured that everything we do in His strength, with His motivation, everything that results from our focus on Jesus, will bear fruit. That fruit, along with the whole church's unified focus on Jesus is what will ultimately hasten and bring that day to pass. That's the hope we have. That's the ongoing process of salvation.

So how does the lack of this piece of armour open us up to attack from the enemy?

One of the ways we've just noted is, we fail to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We take our jolly old time. Why do you think it's taken 2000 years already since Paul started urging us on like this? We haven't been listening have we!

Secondly, without hope, our joy is the next to disappear. Then, we have no strength left.

In our everyday language, "full of hope" is almost a synonym of "joyful", whereas, "hopeless" or "lost all hope" is another way of saying depressed, or lacking in motivation. That's why Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

When we have the hope of the "day of Jesus Christ" before us; the hope that God is taking us into

greater and greater things until that ultimate day, then we become dangerous to Satan and his kingdom, because then there's no stopping us. When we lose that hope; when Christian life becomes humdrum day to day existence, then, we become easy targets for Satan's attacks. He'll easily divert our attention to other things, where it will be that much easier to attack us with the temptation to sin.

We maintain this piece of armour, again, by receiving the Truth that renews our mind. The reason salvation is described as a helmet that covers our head, is that it has to do with our mind being either on the ways of God, or else conformed to the ways of the world.

*Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

The renewing of the mind is one of the processes of salvation. That both keeps the "day of Jesus Christ" as a constant reality before us, as well as guides our thoughts and habits to be more in line with Him.

the shield of faith

Now, we've arrived at the two pieces of our weaponry that we don't simply wear, but actually hold in our hands in active combat with the devil. The shield works for us when we see something coming our way, and we lift the shield and fend it off. The other parts of the armour catch what we missed with our shield.

In that way, it's good to know that our survival doesn't depend on our constantly being ready to exercise our faith. Faith is an active thing, but we can also trust in the Lord's keeping power in times we are so exhausted from the war, all we can do is just hold on to something and gasp for breath.

On the other hand, Paul does mention a specific type of attack in regards to the shield of faith (vs. 6)

...taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Often, the shields were made, not of iron or bronze, but of leather stretched over a frame. The arrows could go through, and perhaps hit the breastplate and the helmet and other pieces, but the ones that were dipped into flammable liquid and lit, would be quenched by the time they got through the leather shield.

Most of the possible wounds we've considered so far have been those incurred by the iron or bronze points of Satan's arrows. Now, for the first time, we see the added danger of fire.

What is fire? Usually, we picture the flame that rises from a combustion of flammable material. That, of course, is the red hot gasses that are released by the chemical reaction. The word for "spirit" in both Greek in Hebrew is actually the word for wind, or breath. That would put it in the same category as the flame, being something like gas.

The fiery darts, then, represent the spiritual side of Satan's attacks. They could be occult, or witchcraft spirits sent to supernaturally attack the believer. They could also be what give the other attacks the added edge -- an attack on our self image could be accompanied by a demonically induced depression. They could also be from curses sent by occultists or from spirits resident in an area.

In other words, your shield of faith is what you must begin using when you take that shortcut through the cemetery at night, and you suddenly get goose-bumps.

In many cultures, particularly in the West, the above illustration may seem laughable. The secular rationalism that has been prevalent for the last 300 or so years has taught us that such things are the stuff of children's storybooks, and have no relevance to real life. The Western mind has thereby been desensitised to the spirit world.

While the western based education system may have taught us more about science and technology, the world view of the tribal societies is much more accurate in describing the spirit world -- that part of reality that science, so far, hasn't developed the capability to gauge.

Don't get me wrong! I'm not trying to push some "new age" philosophy. Just because they are aware of the spirit world, doesn't mean they are free from Satan's power. But the difference between them and the so-called "civilised" cultures is that they know exactly who it is that has had power over them for thousands of years.

That's why it's easier for whole villages and tribes of these peoples to respond to the gospel of Jesus. They know who their enemy is, and they immediately recognise the power of the gospel to overcome that enemy. The war is real, and they know it!

The shield of faith is a more necessary weapon than we are often aware of.

How do we develop our shield of faith?

Make sure you have girded your loins with sufficient Truth regarding your authority in Christ. Some good passages to read and meditate on are Matthew chapter 10, and Luke 10. Particularly Luke 10:19:

"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you..."

With your authority, it isn't necessary to pray and ask God to chase the demons away. You can speak to them directly. James 4:7 says:

...Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

There is also a lot about our authority in the Name of Jesus in John chapters 14 through 16. Also, authority to command circumstances -- not just spirits -- can be found in Mark 11:22-24. There, we see that it's possible to speak to objects, such as mountains, and command them to move. How much more, demons, who can hear what we say?

Finally, it is essential, when using our authority against demons, to have on the *whole* armour -- not just carry the shield of faith. The demons are, after all, intelligent beings, and can spot right off which piece of armour you are lacking. Some believers have found it helpful to verbally go over each piece of armour, and confess the truth of each piece over themselves. We mentioned this practice earlier. This would fit under the category of the shield of faith, being that we are actively exercising faith in each of the areas represented by the armour of God, for that extra edge of protection.

We'll learn yet more about the shield of faith as we discuss the *sword of the spirit*.

the sword of the spirit

*17...the sword of the Spirit, which is the **rhema** of God...*

When discussing this piece, one is also reminded of another reference to the Word of God being a sword, found in the epistle to the Hebrews. Before we can truly understand the relationship between these two passages, we must first understand that there are actually two words in the Greek that mean "word". One is *rhema*, which we find in the present passage, and the other *logos*, which the passage in

Hebrews uses.

Logos generally means something that is written. That's where we get the word "logo", as meaning a trade mark. The Bible in its written form would be *Logos*. Foundational teaching on an important doctrine in the Bible would be *Logos* teaching. The teaching in this book is *Logos* at its centre. It's actually hard, sometimes to draw the line between *Logos* and *Rhema*.

The verse in Hebrews is a good exposé of the power of *Logos*:

Heb 4:12 For the word (logos) of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

This description fits more with what we said about the belt of Truth. You remember, we said that His Word is Truth; and also, Truth is God's character which is transferred to us as we receive His Truth. That is exactly what this verse describes. God's Truth, as a sword piercing into our hearts and discerning our very thoughts and intents as to whether or not they are pure and honest or if they aren't hidden agendas and hypocritical self ambition. What this describes is, not a sword in *our* hands, but in the hands of the Holy Spirit as we allow Him to open it up to us. Thus, it is more applicable to the belt of Truth.

The *Rhema*, which is a part of our armour, is a sword in *our* hands. *Rhema* is the Greek word that means spoken word. It's a word that the Holy Spirit has taken and suddenly made alive in our hearts and provides us with a burst of faith need to get a specific job done, or a supernatural healing, or a burst of hope. Where *Logos* would describe *sound teaching*; *Rhema* is the prophetic word that often accompanies *inspired preaching*.

Romans 10:17 -- So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by a rhema of God.

In teaching *Logos*, we are careful not to take verses out of context and thus misapply them. But a *Rhema* word, on the other hand, may be a verse in the Bible that the Holy Spirit suddenly gives new meaning to for a specific situation. That's okay, because it's not laying a doctrinal foundation; but rather, meeting a specific need, or giving specific direction. One common verse that is often used in this way is Isaiah 54:2, "Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings..." In its *Logos* context that's talking about Israel's future. That's what God meant when He originally gave the Word through Isaiah. However, many have also been given it as a *Rhema* word for themselves, with the message that the Lord is about to expand their sphere of influence. That is a unique feature of the Bible -- its application both as *Logos* and *Rhema*.

As a weapon in our hands *Rhema* is, to us, what the flaming arrows are to Satan's army -- except much more powerful, because they are a part of God's arsenal. When we have been sufficiently girded with Truth -- God's *Logos* Word -- that Word is there ready to become *Rhema* the moment we need to make a lunge at Satan's weak spot.

Quite a lot about what we said about the shield of faith, also applies to the sword of the spirit -- except for the fact that one is primarily defensive, and the other offensive.

So how do we develop our ability to use our swords and shields?

The two main ways are: 1, to receive Truth as the Holy Spirit teaches us; and 2, to begin practising it.

In the context of the armour, we are talking especially about spiritual warfare. Our ability to

exercise *Rhema* ought to be developed in other areas as well, especially in seeking God for direction, and in encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ. But what concerns us in this context is using it as an offensive weapon against Satan. For specific scriptures, refer to the ones listed under the category of the *shield of faith*.

In putting both your shield of faith and your sword of the spirit into practice, don't just practice it on everything that moves. Also, don't just automatically use it on just every spirit shrine, fortune teller shop, pagan worship centre and Masonic lodge you happen to see. It's best to only do that when you're with a group of like-minded believers with the goal of doing sustained prayer and spiritual warfare against the spirits over a specific area. This is where you will encounter some of the others of the four levels of spiritual power we mentioned at the beginning.

This is not a book detailing that type of spiritual warfare. I would advise you to read others more specifically on that topic. C. Peter Wagner, Cindy Jacobs and others have written some excellent ones.

Even apart from "strategic level spiritual warfare", as Peter Wagner calls it, you will still have the opportunity to practice using your spiritual sword and shield of faith on a personal level. Don't go against the ones over your nation until you've begun seeing victory over the ones coming against you and your family.

praying always

¹⁸ ...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -- ¹⁹ and for me...

This verse ties it all together for us. It puts the whole subject in the realm where it belongs. The first thing we noted is that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood", but against spiritual forces. One of our primary functions in this is prayer.

The phrase, "all prayer and supplication" brings our attention to the fact that there are many kinds of prayer. It's true, prayer is simply talking to God. One doesn't need to be an expert at spiritual things to be able to pray. Just open up and start talking. On the other hand, once we begin doing that, and as we submit to the Holy Spirit, many avenues of prayer begin opening up for us. These include simply asking God for something we know is His will, and therefore asking with confidence (I John 5:14,15); commanding demons, or circumstances, as we mentioned earlier; praying in other tongues as the Holy Spirit gives utterance; groanings that the Holy Spirit may initiate in us according to Rom 8:26, which some also refer to as "deep intercession"; and many other types of prayer. Philippians 4:6 has a list of different kinds of prayer to which it adds, "with thanksgiving". It's important to maintain an attitude of thanksgiving as a part of our prayer stance.

We could go into much more detail about all these kinds of prayer, but there are other books that do so quite adequately -- some by authors we've mentioned earlier.

"Being watchful..." -- after all, we are in a war. As anyone who's been on the front lines of a battle will tell you, it's no place to relax and take it easy.

As we grow in Him, we must, among other things, develop a 24 hour consciousness of who we are and what we're doing. That doesn't mean always keeping a straight face when in the presence of our friends and colleagues in the world, nor acting like we're in the clouds. It simply means, never forget who you are. Keep your spiritual ear in tune for the Holy Spirit's promptings, the same way as your natural ears are in tune to the sound of your mobile phone; or a mother's ears are always tuned to the sound of her child crying from the other room. One thing that helps is to spend time with Him on a regular basis. Once you take the effort to tune your heart to Him once in the day, then it comes more

naturally later on.

Finally, we're told to include, along with the other forms of prayer, "supplication for all the saints". Not only is it our objective to protect ourselves by wearing the armour, but our concern is also for all our brothers and sisters in Christ -- some of whom may be only partially dressed. But even the ones who are fully dressed need our prayer.

It's no use to just be well protected all by ourselves. When we arrive before the judgement seat of Christ, it's *not* our objective for God to smile at us and say, "You, out of *all* my children, are the *only* one who kept my word 'till the end."

Wouldn't that be terrible? That's not our objective at all! We are a body. It's *together*, with *all* the saints that we must finally cross the finish line. Jesus is coming for a bride composed of the entire church -- not just one or two who can pride themselves in being more spiritual than the rest.

The reason why we've developed a mentality like that in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles, is that early in our history, we were wounded. Some of us began receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and mainline denominational churches couldn't accept it. They began shooting arrows of accusation and criticism at us.

So what did we do?

Did we seek the face of Jesus for healing? Did we adjust our breastplate of righteousness and our belts of truth?

No. We drew off by ourselves and began licking our wounds. We allowed our bitterness towards them to become a doctrine, as it were, that *we* are the ones God has called, and as *they* have obviously rejected us -- well, they've just rejected *God* haven't they!

Now, since they're on the outside looking in, it doesn't matter *what* they say. "Sticks and stones ...*etc*...!"

That was the protective mechanism we put into place instead of the full armour of God.

The problem with that attitude, is, they are *not* on the outside looking in. We're *all* on the same side of the window -- all of us who call on the Name of Jesus, that is. The Pope is on our side. Ian Paisley is on our side. It's essential that we, as the Body of Christ realise this, and begin truly identifying ourselves with the whole Body of Christ, even if it means being deprived of the false protective mechanism we had built against their criticism.

The only protection we, as believers, have any *business* using is the armour of God. And we don't even get to use all our weapons to fight back, because they're our brothers and sisters in Christ. We can only use our protective parts of our armour, like our breastplate, belt, helmet and shield to fend off their arrows.

In this kind of situation, when our own brothers and sisters in Christ have allowed themselves to become tools of Satan in launching arrows of slander and accusation at us, "supplication for all the saints" is the only option we have. Anything we could possibly say otherwise, may be construed as counter-accusation, and may further wound them instead of heal. We don't want that.

But thank God, prayer is a powerful tool -- perhaps the most powerful weapon in our arsenal that we've mentioned so far. With it, people with no armour at all have sought God, and received, in answer to their prayer: countless souls for the kingdom of God, whole revival movements, and even the pieces of armour that they lacked. Women have won their unbelieving husbands to the Lord without a single word -- just prayer -- when anything they could have said would have only driven them even farther from the Lord.

Finally, Paul said, "Pray ... for me..." There are some, who say that certain parts of the New Testament were only for the period of the apostles. At least they're right about this verse, because we obviously can't pray for Paul now!

If you want, however, you can pray for me instead. Also, the people who were so kind as to publish

this book could use your prayers. What about your pastor, your cell leader, others in your church, missionaries? Many others who are on the front lines could also use your prayers in the same way the early believers prayed for Paul.

After all, we're all in this together.

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