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## Editor's Introduction

You may remember that my editorials all focused on evangelism in 2015. It's an important topic and one that we need to keep in the forefront of our minds! This issue of YPS has a very interesting article by a new writer, Tim Lancelot, called 'Who should I witness to?' – it's worth a read. Jeremy Singer continues to take us through 'the Acts' with a look at Ephesus, which fits very nicely with the second of Andrew Robertson's articles on the armour of God from Ephesians chapter 6. I like it when I get a good balanced diet! YPS gives you a balanced spiritual diet in this issue – we have evangelism, Bible food, core strength, church growth and the Lord's coming. Happy grazing!

*Stephen Baker*

### CORE STRENGTH -

## The armour of God



**BY ANDREW ROBERTSON CHATHAM, ONTARIO, CANADA**

*"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness" Eph. 6. 14 NKJV*

Michael Jordan may be one of the greatest players to ever play the game of basketball. Yet, as great as he was, it wasn't until his seventh professional season in the NBA that he finally led the Chicago Bulls to one of many championships. Some have claimed it was because of a new trainer who helped Jordan focus on his core strength. The 'core' is the group of muscles in our midsection that help support the spine when we move. Just about every movement we make somehow involves core strength, even our breathing. It is the basis of physical ability.

Roman soldiers knew about core strength too. It's no secret in the Bible

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that physical movement is directly related to the core muscles. The old English idiom, 'gird up the loins' was like saying 'dress for action'. It's not a coincidence that when deciding which piece of armour to describe first, Paul began with the soldier's core. The belt came before everything else. Other pieces of armour were attached to it, and it gave the soldier freedom and strength to move quickly. And for us, before anything else, and underneath everything else, a Christian prepared for the devil's attacks will have the 'core strength' of his mind supported by truth.

When the enemy comes, he will use different methods to assault us, but those different schemes all involve lies. His roaring and his angelic messages are lies. Please don't underestimate him, or overestimate yourself!

Notice what he did with the truth when he approached Eve in Genesis chapter 3. The first thing he did was to *distort* it. 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden"?' It's so close to the truth that it's almost impossible to spot the lie. He spoke true words, but he twisted the emphasis just enough to distort their view of God. He tweaked their theology to make it look as though God was holding something back from them.

Then Eve followed suit and took another step to attack truth. She *added* to it. She explained to the serpent what God had really said, and she told the serpent that God didn't just tell them not to 'eat' of the tree, but also not to 'touch' it. But God did not say that. She did. And ever since, we have continued to add to God's words and commands with our own self-righteous rules and traditions.

The third blow to truth was *denial*. The serpent had set her up for his outright affront to what God had said. This time, there is no twisting or distortion involved. 'You will *not* surely die'. What started as a subtle distortion and addition had developed into a full-blown rejection of God's unbreakable word. But he is not finished with his attack on truth just yet.

With one final swoop he takes aim, and this time, he *replaces* it with his own alternative. 'For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'. The serpent doesn't merely destroy truth; he replaces it with 'another gospel'.

What the enemy did in the beginning with his lies, he is doing in your life as you read this. He continues to offer you alternatives to the true gospel of living by the power of Christ alone. He distorts your view of your heavenly Father. He sows his seeds of doubt in your mind. He openly confronts your understanding of scripture and your gospel-centred worldview. He sets up counterfeits with promises of happiness, and security, and meaning. He has no intention of delivering on those promises. He doesn't need to. He is a thief who has come only to steal and kill and destroy.

But here's the good news: truth cannot be destroyed! Do you remember the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel? Do you remember all the frantic, pathetic actions of those 450 prophets of Baal? How they danced, and chanted, and disgraced themselves? Do you also remember the confident actions of Elijah as he drenched his altar before praying for fire with simple words? If there's one lesson we take as we leave Mount Carmel, it's that a lie cannot be made true, and truth cannot be destroyed. No matter how hard you try to drench the truth or scream for the lie to come to life, the truth will always be true. We didn't invent it, and we cannot destroy it. It is not defined by our emotions. It stands separate from us. It is what it is, and that's good news!

But truth is more personal than just hard realities and facts. All truth is only true because it finds its source in a Person. Jesus told His disciples, 'I am *the* truth . . . no one comes to the Father except through me'. And when the religious leaders were crucifying Jesus, they were not merely trying to destroy Him, they were trying to erase the truth. But Mount Carmel and Mount Calvary are very similar – truth cannot be destroyed, and the Author of all truth cannot be held in a grave. To bow to Jesus Christ is to submit to what is true. To embrace truth is to be truly free.

If only Eve had been looking to the One who must always be trusted. Don't repeat her tragedy. Look at the world and all of life through the lens of scripture. Test everything, and don't trust in feelings or emotions. Make sure your knowledge of God is anchored to truth as defined by the Source of life. He Himself must be your 'core strength' against the enemy of your soul.

## THE BIBLE

## Food For Development

BY ALAN AFFLECK LOSSIEMOUTH, SCOTLAND



My 14-year-old nephew plays for the youth team of an SPL football club. As a result he is very concerned with two things: his exercise regime and what he eats. He is knowledgeable on the subject, aware of which foods will improve or adversely affect his performance. The Bible describes itself as food which can positively affect our lives as Christians.

## The Bible is like bread

When Jesus responded to the temptation of Satan with the words 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God', Matt. 4. 4 NKJV, he was identifying scripture to be as essential to our spiritual life as bread is to our physical life. If you want the spiritual nature inside you to be more dominant than your old nature then it must be fed.

## The Bible is like milk

Milk is essential for a baby and full of the correct nutrients appropriate to that stage of life. Not only is solid food inappropriate, but it could be harmful as the child's body is unprepared for it.

Everyone was a baby once, so a young believer should never feel inadequate because they find some scriptural truths hard to grasp. Every preacher, elder and knowledgeable Christian started with the milk of the word.

Just as babies are weaned onto solid food at different ages, so you may find that peers might 'develop' at what seems like a faster rate than you. Don't be discouraged by this. The important thing is not the rate at which you grow but simply that you are growing. Peter gives us the

assurance that if we 'like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk', 1 Pet. 2. 2 ESV, we will grow.

A young believer is someone who has not been a Christian for a long time rather than simply a young person. They can enjoy the milk of the word by simply reading the Bible, becoming acquainted with Bible stories and the Bible timeline, and memorizing key verses and passages.

## The Bible is like solid food

In the last article we considered the use of a daily reading book or similar tool to ensure we are 'washing' with the word each day, and while this will help to cleanse us from outside influences, it will not be sufficient for spiritual growth. It is expected that all believers will progress in their understanding of spiritual things, that is, they should be able to cope with the consideration of more complex scriptural truths and make connections between various passages. When Paul writes to the Corinthian church, 'I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready', 1 Cor. 3. 2 ESV, he is not speaking to a group of teachers but to the whole church at Corinth.

Consider your assembly when the elders have gone home to heaven. Who will take their place? When there are no Bible teachers, who will instruct the saints? Which godly men and women will the next generation of believers turn to for spiritual advice? The writer of the book of Hebrews deals with this problem when he admonishes the Christians saying 'though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you', Heb. 5. 12 ESV.

A young Christian can begin the progression onto solid food by taking notes from Bible teaching meetings and going back over connections made by the speaker following the meeting. Luke commends the Bereans for doing this in Acts chapter 17 verse 11. Another method of developing onto solid food is through the use of Bible study aids. There is something appropriate to each stage of Christian life and local elders will be able to give you advice in this area. Finally, if your assembly or a neighbouring assembly conducts a Bible reading take full advantage of this. Read the passage before hand, perhaps using a study aid to establish your own thoughts,

and you will then be able to compare these with other points that are made at the meeting.

## The Bible is like honey

Not only does food help us to develop but it also provides us with energy. When the men of Israel were faint following battle, Jonathan said, 'See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey', 1 Sam. 14. 29. In a similar way the Bible can revitalise us when we are struggling spiritually, Psalm chapter 19 verse 7 states, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul' ESV.

### WHO SHOULD I

## Witness to

BY **TIM LANCELOT SKELMANTHORPE**

Imagine the scene in Nazareth: village folk having set aside their work for the weekly Sabbath are sitting down in the relative coolness of the synagogue building to listen – as generations before them had – to the local rabbi teach. A shaft of sunlight through a window reflects on the gold gilt of the hallowed scroll, as it is passed with care from the attendant to a young man of good reputation and recent eminence who would read the next verses from the ancient prophecy of Isaiah. Nothing would seem unusual as the Lord Jesus Christ would read with clarity and reverence from the scroll:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord', Luke 4. 18-19.

Suddenly the atmosphere inside the Synagogue changed as the Lord closed the book, sat down and declared that the scripture was fulfilled that day in their ears. No wonder they described His words as gracious or kind – if ever there was a need for one to preach the gospel to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, preach deliverance to the captives and give sight back to the blind, it was there and then in needy Nazareth!

Surely the same is true today: if ever there was a need to preach the gospel to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, preach deliverance to the captives and give sight back to the blind is it not today in our communities? The deep needs of those around us haven't changed from those back in the days when the Lord walked on this earth. Nor has the answer to man's need changed, it is still Christ. Yet it seems that the ones who, then and now, were the most despised by society were also the ones most

likely to be open to accepting the grace and love of the Saviour.

The Lord has called believers to 'go . . . into all the world and preach the gospel', Mark 16. 15. Yet many of us find it hard to witness for the Saviour. The question, 'Who should I witness to?' might be in your mind! I would like to share a handful of personal experiences where the Lord has graciously given me the opportunity to witness to someone who I feel could be described by the same words of Isaiah that the Lord applied to Himself in that Nazareth synagogue. For confidentiality I have not used their real names.

### The Poor: Eric

Eric was somebody I met whilst giving out gospel leaflets as a student. Despite a relatively wealthy upbringing, a descent into drugs and eventually contracting the AIDS virus meant that he was poor in every way. The Lord said that the poor would always be with us, and even in a wealthy country such as England, many are debt and poverty-ridden – and hungry. Unsure what to do for the best, my flatmate and I cooked him a simple meal and cycled to his squat with the pan of hot food. It was clear that he appreciated the small token of friendship and respect, and the door was opened to the preaching of the gospel to poor Eric.

### The Broken-Hearted: Harry

I am haunted by Harry's words to me on a recent car journey, 'Is it too much to ask for just one person to love me unconditionally?' As well as suffering abuse as a child his mother still reminds him that she wishes she had aborted the pregnancy before he was born. Harry is broken-hearted. He is reading God's word, but he needs to see the love of God through the people of God before he can understand that God loves him unconditionally.

### The Captives: Jake

At a recent visit to Jake's house I counted three full bin bags of empty beer cans. Jake is captive to alcohol and has been since he became broken-hearted at the suicide of his partner. Earlier in life Jake had been a professional with a wife, two children, and a secure home. People like Jake don't just live in poor communities: the needy are all around us – sometimes behind closed doors. Jake needs the deliverance that the Lord spoke of. He attends gospel meetings readily, and the Lord has convicted him of his need of salvation. We pray that in the Lord's time he will know the deliverance of the Lord, not only from death by alcohol poisoning but from eternal death.

### The Blind: Simon

Simon was an intelligent and likeable work colleague with whom I shared a love for the outdoors. Turning the conversation one day to the God who made everything, Simon replied, 'It's not that I have chosen to believe in evolution, I've just never been told there was a rational alternative'. Simon was blind to the truth of creation and needed someone to at least describe what they can see.

These are four real people that God has graciously given me the opportunity to witness to. I don't know of any of these who have repented and believed the gospel as yet, but as Paul writes in Romans chapter 10 verse 14, 'How shall they hear without a preacher?'

If you are burdened about who God would have you witness to concerning His lovely Son, look around and you will see individuals who are poor, broken-hearted, captive, blind, or even bruised. These are the people who the Saviour came to and for; as the Lord said in Luke chapter 4 verse 19, 'This is the acceptable year of the Lord'.

ADVENTURES IN ACTS

# Acts 18-20 - Events at Ephesus

BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

PHILO of Byzantium identified Seven Wonders of the ancient world. These were the must-see tourist destinations – the original ‘bucket list’! Seven monuments of amazing architectural endeavour were located across the Mediterranean and Middle East, from Zeus’ statue at Olympia to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

The Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders, was sited at Ephesus. It was supported by 127 columns and featured sculpture from some of the greatest artists of the age. This temple was the favourite Wonder of ANTIPATER OF SIDON: ‘When I saw the sacred house of Artemis that towers to the clouds, the other [Wonders] were placed in the shade’.<sup>1</sup>

In Christian terms, there was a far more significant spiritual building at Ephesus, Eph. 2. 22. The church at Ephesus was probably established during Paul’s second visit. The Ephesian church subsequently appears throughout the New Testament. Other visitors apart from Paul include Apollos, Acts 18. 24, Aquila and Priscilla, v. 26, and Timothy, 1 Tim. 1. 3. The church received a letter from Paul, then a final communication from the Lord Jesus via John, Rev. 2. 1-7. Ephesus has more coverage than any other local church in the New Testament.

In this review, let’s think about the place, the preaching and the opposition, mostly from Acts chapters 18-20.

## The Place

Ephesus was a key city in the Roman province of Asia, modern-day Turkey. This strategic port was a routine intermediate location for people travelling east or west. Bruce<sup>2</sup> describes it as ‘the greatest commercial city of Asia Minor’. It was renowned for its silver, whether currency, Acts 19. 19, or pagan trinkets, v. 24. Paul initially made a brief visit, Acts 18. 19, but he promised to return. His second stay was much



longer, over two years, 19. 10. This was the greatest recorded duration that Paul spent in any location. MACLAREN<sup>3</sup> notes that 'the most populous cities were his favourite fields'. Paul knew that if he preached at Ephesus, then gospel ripples would spread across the region, 19. 10.

When he later wrote to the Ephesian Christians, Paul reminded them that they were 'in Christ', Eph. 2. 6. We share the same privileged place by divine grace.

## The Preaching

Paul used various locations for preaching. He started in the synagogue, Acts 19. 8, which was his standard practice, Rom. 1. 16. After his expulsion by the arrogant Jews, he moved to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, a public education establishment, Acts 19. 9. It seems that Tyrannus did not need its facilities during the middle of the day. Due to the hot Mediterranean climate, most Ephesians would have an afternoon break. During this interval, Paul would borrow the classroom. He sacrificed his siesta so he could preach the word. Plenty of others gave up their midday break as well to listen to Paul. Would we listen to the word of God if it caused inconvenience?

Paul's preaching involved discussion, 'disputing and persuading', Acts 19. 8. However, his subject was consistent, 'repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ', 20. 21. As well as public preaching, he taught 'from house to house', v. 20. Aquila and Priscilla always had an open home for the scriptures and the saints, 18. 26.

Paul's message was not restricted to evangelism. He also taught new believers 'all the counsel of God', 20. 27. This material is further expanded in his letter. The key point is that doctrine should not only affect our *head* intellectually, but also our *heart* devotionally and our *feet* practically. The Christian faith was known as the 'way' in Ephesus, 19. 9, 23. This involves our daily walk as believers, Eph. 4. 1, 17.

Paul's *activity* is described, but we also learn about his *attitude*, Acts 20. 19. He was characterized by humility and self-sacrifice in service, v. 24. This was genuine Christ-likeness. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to display the same attitude, Eph. 5. 2. We must also follow his example.

## The Opposition

Paul wrote to other churches while he was at Ephesus. He described his circumstances: 'A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries', 1 Cor. 16. 9. Whenever there is *opportunity*, there will also be *opposition*. Paul found this throughout his missionary service. At Ephesus, opponents included religious Jews, Acts 19. 9, materialistic pagans, v. 24, and false Christian teachers, 20. 30.

Although our society is different, we still have opportunities for 'redeeming the time', Eph 5. 16, and sharing the gospel. Therefore, we should stand against opposition, as Paul instructed the Ephesians to do. We must rely on the sure resources provided by the Lord, 'the whole armour of God', 6. 11.

<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven\\_Wonders\\_of\\_the\\_Ancient\\_World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Wonders_of_the_Ancient_World) for details.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. BRUCE, *The Book of the Acts*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *Acts*, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/maclaren/acts/20.htm>

PART 1

# The Lord's coming

BY PAUL ROBINSON MANCHESTER

## Introduction

Many years ago I heard a speaker liken the Lord's coming for the believer to people waiting for a bus. There are those who wait for the bus but are busy doing other things whilst they wait, like reading the paper, talking to others, daydreaming, and using their mobile phones. They are waiting for the bus but their minds are elsewhere. On the other hand, there are others who are also waiting for the bus but are actively looking for it. They are stood up, looking down the road to see whether or not it is in sight, looking at their watches, consulting the bus timetable etc. They are waiting and their minds are focused on the appearance of the bus. In the end, all of them will get on the same bus, despite the difference in the manner of their waiting.

And so it is with the Lord's coming. When He comes all believers will be taken, those who are not thinking too much about it, as well as those who are actively waiting! In his first Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul refers to the Lord's coming in each chapter, and gives five reasons why we should not just be waiting passively, but actively.

## Service

In chapter 1 verses 9 to 10, Paul reminds the believers at Thessalonica of the day when they were saved and 'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come'.

Every believer can relate to these words for we all have a moment *in our past* when we were saved, and are looking for that moment *in our*

*future* when the Lord will come for us. But *in the interim* we have a unique window of opportunity to serve the living and true God!

So one reason why we should be more positive as we wait for the Lord's return is that this time of waiting is an opportunity to use those gifts that God has given to each of us for His service.

## Reward

In chapter 2 verses 19 to 20 Paul looks forward to the Lord's coming because it will be *a time of joy and glory*. He writes, 'For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy'.

It will be *a time of joy* because Paul will be reunited with these believers from Thessalonica, many of whom he had led to the Lord. He had hoped to see them again in this life yet Satan had hindered him from doing so, v. 18. However, Satan will not stop this reunion when the Lord comes. Imagine meeting up again with someone whom we have led to the Lord, or who was a link in the chain of our own salvation. What a joyful experience that will be!

It will be *a time of glory* for shortly after the Lord's coming is the judgement seat of Christ. This is when rewards for faithful service will be given to the believer. Crowns speak of reward and Paul refers here to the 'crown of rejoicing', one of five crowns mentioned in the New Testament. How gracious God is! He not only saves us and brings us into His family, but He deigns to reward us for our feeble efforts in His service.

To be continued