

Session 8: Faith

Faith, Hope, and Love: Rediscovering the Essentials of Christianity

Joshua Hawkins – www.joshuahawkins.com

Three Characteristics: Faith, Hope, and Love

1. In response to the continuing story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, the New Testament holds out a simple, 3-fold framework as the measuring rod for Christian maturity: *faith, hope, and love*.

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(1 Thessalonians 1:2–3 ESV)

“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:8 ESV)

“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

(Romans 5:2 ESV)

“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.”

(Galatians 5:5 ESV)

“if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven”

(Colossians 1:23 ESV)

“who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

(1 Peter 1:21 ESV)

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

(1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV)

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love”

(1 Thessalonians 3:6 ESV)

**“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,”
(Ephesians 1:15 ESV)**

**“and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit”
(Romans 5:5 ESV)**

2. For the early church, these concepts were central to prayer and discipleship. As we know by now, these are not abstract or malleable concepts - they are all rooted in the story of the Old Testament and Jesus’ first coming.

The Basics of Faith

1. We can begin with a simple, general definition of faith: *trusting something to be true*. When we are assured that something is true and reliable, we are walking in *faith*.
2. Biblically, faith is connected to the *certainty of God’s promises*. It is not wishful thinking or some sort of secret “inner knowing”. When the Bible calls us to faith, it calls us to *assurance* and *trust* in God, confident that His story will reach its promised culmination despite what seems to be evidence to the contrary. This confidence can be strengthened by having clarity on *what* has been promised to come to pass and *who* it is that’s ensuring its outcome.

**“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”
(Hebrews 11:1 NIV)**

3. The Bible gives us God’s words, therefore they can be trusted as *reliable*. Though we may not understand everything with perfect clarity, God has proven His words are true by verifying them through real, historical events – the biggest, most important being *the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*.

**“that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
(2 Peter 1:20–21 ESV)**

**“For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”
(Acts 17:31 NIV)**

4. As words of truth, the Bible tells us the way things actually are. To agree with the words of God in the Scriptures is to have faith in God as He has revealed Himself.

The Context of Biblical Faith: The Biblical Story

1. As we have developed over the last seven sessions, the Scriptures lead us through real history and tell us how God has promised to *make all things right* once again through a seed of Eve, a man called Abraham, a nation called Israel, and a king from David's line. All that was lost because of Adam and Eve's transgression would be *restored and reinstated*.
2. Moreover, we have seen that the "end" of Biblical revelation is encapsulated in a singular, climactic event called *the Day of the LORD* (Isaiah 13:6,9; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:14; Amos 5:18; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). This future Day will bring low the pride, sin, and rebellion of man that began in the garden-sanctuary in Eden. Blind to the horrors of sin, deaf to the cries of the prophets, and ignorant of the impending judgment on unrighteousness, man presses on in his pride and arrogance towards this coming Day.

"The haughtiness of man shall be humbled... the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day." (Isaiah 2:17 ESV)

"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless." (Isaiah 13:9, 11 ESV)

3. All have sinned and fallen short of their created purpose to give glory to God (Romans 3:23), and therefore all are subject to God's righteous wrath. Yet for those who acknowledge their unrighteousness, bear the fruits of *repentance*, and put their *faith* in God's arrangement of a sin-bearing sacrifice, the coming Day of the LORD would be a day of joy and vindication. The repentant "look forward" (2 Peter 3:13, NIV) to that Day where God promised that He would:

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind." (Isaiah 65:17 ESV)

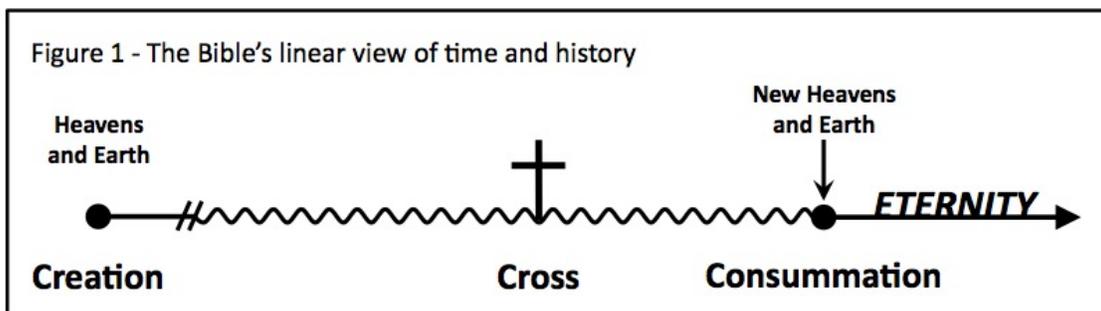
“For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

(Psalms 37:10–11 NKJV)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.””

(Revelation 21:1–5 ESV)

4. When the New Testament beckons us to have *faith* in God, it is calling us to *believe in God’s promised outcome of this story* (cf. Hebrews 11). Though it is so easy to be caught up in the pain and struggles of our lives in this present evil age, this simple timeline and bigger story is what *faith, hope, and love* are all about.



Trusting in God’s Arrangement

1. The Day of the LORD is described throughout the Scriptures in three different ways, each which correspond to the *royal, judicial, and economic* aspects of God, life, and creation:
 - a. Royal aspect - The day of *wrath/anger*
 - b. Judicial aspect - The day of *judgment*
 - c. Economic aspect - The day of *recompense*

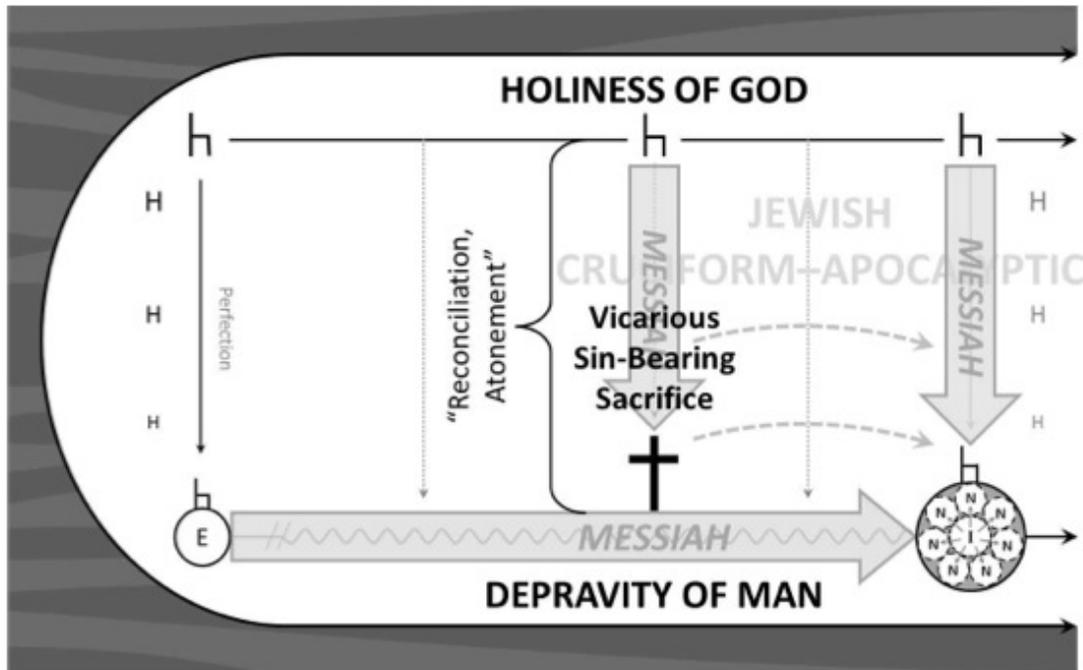
2. The question of how sinful man can escape *wrath, judgment* and *recompense* and be reconciled to God was first answered through the Law given to Israel through Moses. Through obedience to God's commands and by setting forth a sin-bearing sacrificial system for the disobedient to *atone* for sin, the Law held out a means by which Israel could become righteous, thus inheriting the promises God made to Abraham and bringing *blessing* to the nations of the earth.
3. However, Israel did not *want* to keep the Law because of their depraved hearts (Psalm 78:10-11). In fact, both Jew and Gentile alike are "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), "sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2; cf. Romans 11:32), and "sinners" (Romans 5:19; Galatians 2:17; 1 Timothy 1:15). Reconciliation with God could not come through the Law that was "weakened by the flesh" (Romans 8:3), so:

"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,"
(Romans 8:3 ESV)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son"
(John 3:16 ESV)

4. The Scriptures boldly declare that both Jew and Gentile alike can be forgiven of their sin and reconciled to God by *faith in the sacrificial death of the promised Davidic king*, Jesus the Messiah. Thus *faith*, as the New Testament primarily refers to it, is understood as *trusting and having confidence in God's sin-bearing arrangement that reconciles us back to Him*.

"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."
(Romans 5:8–10 ESV)



5. Humanity seeks reconciliation with God in many ways. Yet God has identified that *faith in the death of the Messiah* is the *only way* to be reconciled to Him. The message of the crucified and resurrected Messiah as God’s sin-bearing sacrifice is a *stumbling block* to the Jews and *foolishness* to the Gentiles:

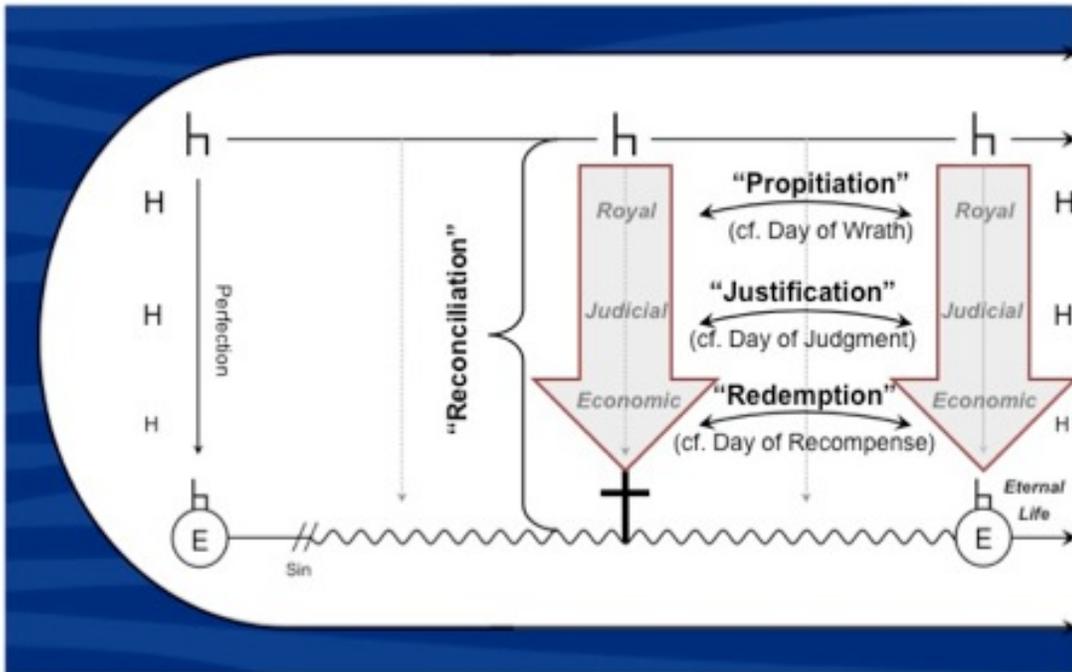
“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”
(1 Timothy 2:5–6 ESV)

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,”
(1 Corinthians 1:18, 21–23 ESV)

6. Under this arrangement, righteousness is *reckoned* or *credited* to us just as it was credited through the Law’s sacrificial system. However, it is not the blood of a bull or a goat that merits us - Jesus’ sacrificial blood establishes us as *righteous* in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). In light of the Day of the LORD, the King of Israel’s self-sacrifice accomplishes righteousness in three ways: *propitiation, justification, and redemption*:

**“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”
(Romans 3:21–25 ESV)**

7. The cross satisfies these three aspects that all humanity is due on the Day of the LORD. In each case, God put forward His son in our place and on our behalf to satisfy the wrath, judgment, and retribution of God, that those of *faith* might find *reconciliation* with the Holy One (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18ff; Colossians 1:20ff).
 - a. *Propitiation* is the appeasement of *wrath/anger* (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)
 - b. *Justification* is the acquittal of *judgment* (Romans 3:20ff; 5:1ff; Galatians 2:16ff)
 - c. *Redemption* is the *payment* of debt (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:12).



8. When we truly believe these things and cast ourselves at the Cross by *faith*, we are “*declared righteous*” (cf. Rom. 2:13; 3:20) in God’s sight, and thus we confidently trust that we will be *saved* from the wrath of God on the Day of the LORD. We can go on to eagerly anticipate of the return of Jesus to *give us eternal life and restore all things*, just as God has promised (Acts 3:19-21).

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith (‘justified by His blood’, vs. 9), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (‘the glory that is to be revealed to us’, Rom. 8:18)... Having now been justified by His blood (looking back to the Cross), we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (looking forward to His Day).”
(Romans 5:1-9)

“That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith... and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”
(Philippians 3:8-11 NIV)

“Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”
(Titus 3:7 NIV)

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away (‘bear’, NASB) the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.
(Hebrews 9:28 NIV)

“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”
(2 Timothy 4:8 ESV)

9. In summary, God includes any of us (Jew and Gentile) into the “Abrahamic blessing” that is finally and ultimately realized in the future “New Covenant” with the house of Israel based on our *faith* in Christ crucified. Today we can look upon the cross and the empty tomb of Israel’s Messiah and agree (by repentance and faith) in its testimony regarding our complete utter depravity, the atonement He provided in His Son, and put our faith in the future resurrection from the dead. God “seals us” to the day of the resurrection of the righteous by giving us His “first-fruits Spirit” today, including us in the

future day when He pours out His Spirit at the resurrection and the kingdom.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1 ESV)

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:17–18 ESV)

The Challenge of Faith

1. Nothing seems more “primitive” to the modern, rationalistic mind than a sacrificial death of an ancient Jewish king to save repentant humanity from an apocalyptic day when God pours out wrath on the unrighteous. This intentional arrangement is God’s direct challenge to the pride and strength of man, and therefore must be humbly received *by faith*.

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe... we preach Christ crucified ...” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 20–21, 23 ESV)

“[we] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Romans 3:24–25 ESV)

2. In light of the message of the cross, biblical faith is a heart-level trust and reliance on real, historical actions and words spoken by God Himself. He calls us to *trust Him* that, through His arrangement, our sin will not count against us when He comes to judge.

“Imagine standing over a young bull with a repentant heart concerning sins common to man. After laying your hands upon the animal and killing it, what has changed? The memory of the sin still remains. The effect upon family and friends still remains. It demands faith on behalf of the worshipper to trust and believe that God truly

accounts the sin forgiven. The same applies to every atonement circumstance in the Scriptures. Judgment is coming at midnight (Ex. 12:12); will God really pass over us on account of a little blood on the door? Snakes are biting, and people are actually dying (Num. 21:6); will God really heal us if we look at a snake on a pole?”¹

3. The foolishness and offensiveness of the message of *faith in Christ crucified* is the root of the New Testament’s virtually constant exhortation to “continue in the faith” (Colossians 1:22-23), to run the “race” (Galatians 5:7; 1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7), and to “fight the fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). God’s means of atonement only applies when it is held unto the day of judgment. The only guarantee of our salvation comes through *persevering faith* as we abandon our own strength and continually cast ourselves on God’s mercy unto the Day of Christ Jesus.

“he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard,”
(Colossians 1:22-23 ESV)

4. Though we wrestle with a body of death in this age (Romans 7:7-25) and are continually bombarded by temptations to sin in every capacity, we must not give in and resign ourselves to compromise. As people of faith, we must continually cast our sin upon the sin offering, and *go on believing and trusting* in God’s arrangement. We must simply *cling to the cross* if we wish to inherit God’s promises of resurrection and restoration.

Distortions of Faith

1. In the modern “Christianese” dialect, *faith* is a word that has lost so much of its original meaning and has been often disconnected from the story in which it finds its roots. It is more commonly associated with the general idea of “belief” and thus is applied to various situations, i.e. “faith for healing”, “faith for breakthrough”, “faith for finances”, etc.
2. While the Lord does desire to show compassion to us by healing our bodies and providing for our needs (as *signs* that point to who He is and to what the age to come will be like), we must be careful to maintain the cohesiveness of these *signs* to the broader context of the story of redemption.
3. When *faith* is divorced from a Person and His story and instead bound to ideas and abstractions, the human heart disengages over time and

¹ Harrigan, John. *The Gospel of Christ Crucified*, chapter 8, p. 31; pulled from <http://www.gospelofchristcrucified.com/book.html>

disillusionment often results. Real events (creation, the cross, and the Day of the LORD) anchor our hearts in a *personal* trust in Jesus.

4. Platonic distortions of the goal of redemption (annihilation of the physical universe and/or an escape to an immaterial heaven) causes sin in the “physical realm” to lose its horrific severity. It lessens real accountability for sin, and diminishes the call to *faith* - to trust Him to be saved from a real day of judgment.

“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”
(Romans 14:10–12 ESV)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.”
(2 Corinthians 5:10–11 ESV)

“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.””
(1 Corinthians 1:28–31 ESV)

5. The truths of *faith* (in addition to hope and love) are vehemently opposed by the powers of darkness. The fight to *continue believing the truth* is what “spiritual warfare” in the Scriptures is about.

“For though we [in context, Paul and the apostles] walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds [of the mind]. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God (arguments and opinions against the truth of who God really is and what Christ has done), and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your [the Corinthians’] obedience is complete.”
(2 Corinthians 10:3–6 ESV)

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm (confident in truth). Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,”
(Ephesians 6:11–17 ESV)