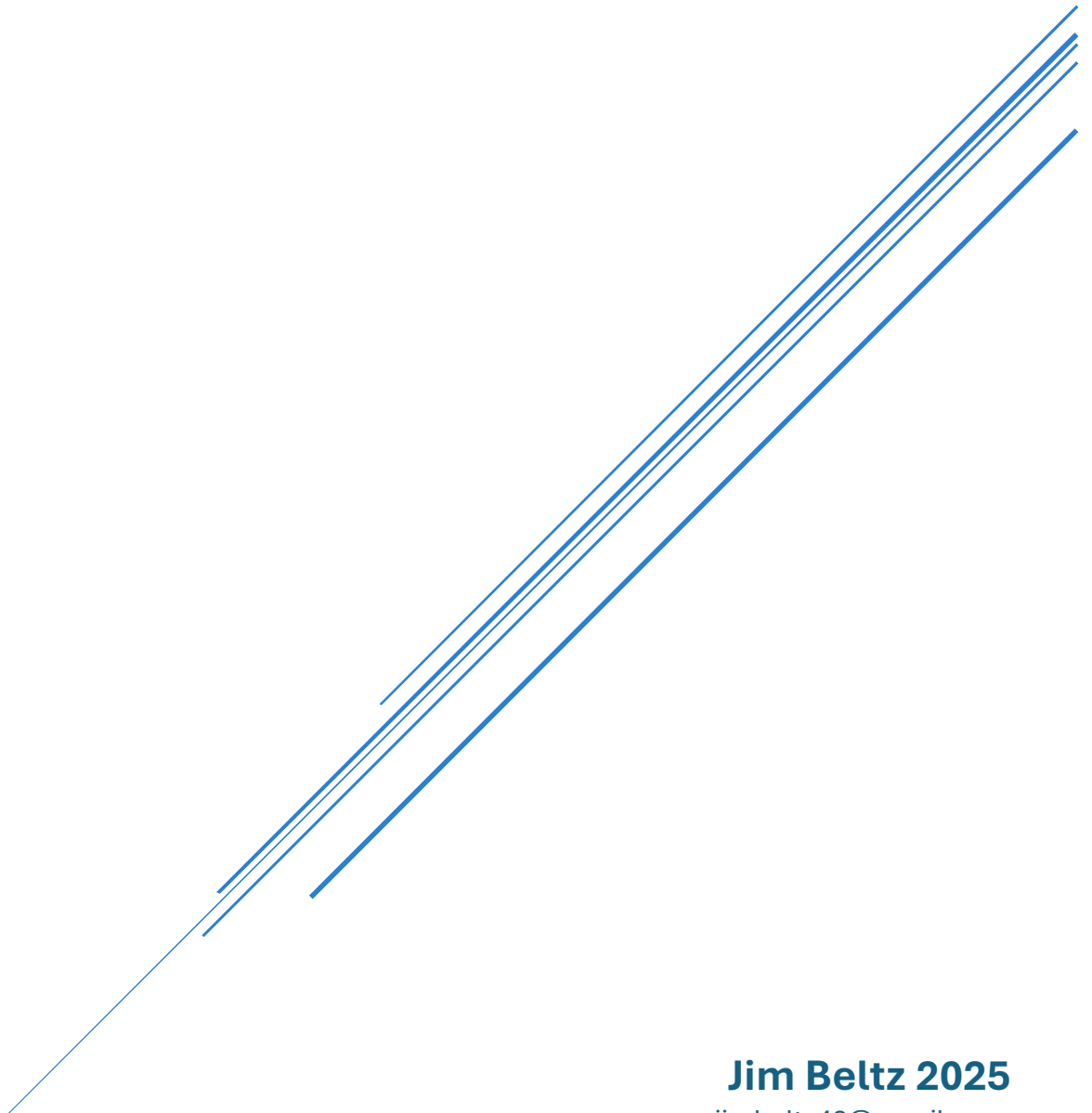


SWORD SHARPENERS

“The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph 6:17)



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SWORD SHARPENERS

Doctrinal integrity (1)

We are so richly blessed to have the inspired word of God in written form, to read and study as we wish. Its doctrines are holy and its precepts are binding. Its histories are factual and its decisions are immutable. Sadly, not everyone gives the scriptures its rightful place in determining proper conduct in personal and religious matters.

Far too many preachers, elders and entire congregations have ignored plain Bible teaching and now embrace false doctrine. Many others may not teach false doctrine, but will not oppose false doctrine or liberal tendencies in any fashion. Their position is to remain completely silent on the perversions which are taking over the brotherhood. It is obvious to all who are paying attention that in their actions they have compromised with the devil.

The churches of Christ, both locally and world-wide, are not to teach a doctrine of 'go along to get along.' Jesus never compromised His teachings in order to make someone feel good. He taught the truth with love (Eph 4:15), but He never weakened the message to make someone feel better. Jesus taught repentance. Repentance means getting out of sin and stay out of sin. According to Matthew 4:17 repentance was His message from the very beginning of His ministry, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He taught that baptism was necessary to be saved, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

Jesus did not compromise Bible teaching and neither should we. We never read of Peter, John, Jude or Paul compromising Bible truth to win friends and make people feel good about being in their sinful condition. We read of powerful messages urging people to take off sin as a dirty garment and to cast it aside. We see book after book in the Bible that urge people to put on righteousness in obedience.

Truth is truth and truth knows no fear. In a world full of error and half-truths we must constantly guard against dimming the light of the gospel. The church of today needs powerful preaching and no-nonsense teaching in our Bible classes. God expects it and the modern world needs it.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

The Bible (2)

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. It should make common sense (not so common any more) for a person to desire the most accurate, dependable translation of God's word to read and study. Far too many individuals have sought an 'easy to read' version (full of mistakes and doctrinal errors) over a version which is tried and true, like the King James Version.

The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible reveals God's directions for all mankind. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read such statements as "God said..." or "these are the words of the Lord..." These electric statements occur thousands of times in both the Old and New Testaments.

The inspired writer of the 119th Psalm wrote these words, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (v 89). It was Jesus that said, "...have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God... (Matt 22:31). Ridenour (1967, pg 2) has written that there are 2,700 such statements in the Old Testament alone, all claiming that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

What does it mean to claim to be inspired? Our English word 'inspired' comes from a Latin word which means "*to breathe upon* or *to breathe into something.*" When the Bible claims inspiration for itself it is actually claiming that the text is "God-breathed." The term 'verbal, plenary inspiration' means that every word of the Bible is divinely inspired and authoritative. God has guided the inspired writers to record exactly what He wanted the writers to make known to the readers.

Therein lies the problem with our modern Bible translations. Far too often they do not translate the original text, but rather give an interpretation of the words. God wants a word for word translation before the students, not an interpretation.

God inspired holy men to write a spiritual message for mankind (2 Pet 1:21). When we sacrifice the true message to make the text 'easy to read' we have joined forces with the devil.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Our war (3)

War is hard. War is dangerous. War is not for the weak of spirit. Let us never forget that we in the Lord's church are at war. Of course, our war is with Satan and his minions, but we must keep in mind that sometimes members lose their way and end up fighting on the wrong side. Notice well Paul's words in Galatians 2:3-5 "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (emphasis added, jb).

We all know that we have to do battle with atheists, agnostics and every member of the world religions (e.g. Muslim, Buddhist, etc.). We, as faithful members of the one church, the body of Christ (Eph 1:22, 23), are to oppose religious error. All religious people are not in that one body (Eph 4:4), but are working and warring on Satan's side. We often confuse morality with faithfulness. A moral person is not a godly person if they reject our Lord's teaching on the one true church. The church of Christ meant so much to Him that He shed His precious blood to purchase it (Acts 20:28). Every denomination on earth demeans and debases the glorious church of Christ (Rom 16:16). Their contention is that one church is as good as another. Where is the scripture that supports such a degenerate position?

The church needs brothers and sisters, preachers and elders who will publicly stand up for those in the fray. She needs those who are fighting with a strong stance against error and religious complacency (Jude 3). What we find far too often today are people who will not defend the defenders of truth. Their swords stay in their scabbards and truth and common sense suffer. Error goes unchecked and unchallenged.

Brethren, sharpen your swords (Eph 6:17), defend the truth, defend those who are gallantly fighting for the unadulterated purity of the gospel. The war needs you.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Objective truth (4)

Jesus declared, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:32, KJV). Truth is objective, not subjective. What do those proponents of a subjective truth hope to achieve? They hope to water down biblical teachings to a matter of opinion or attitude. They hope to get misguided people to accept that as the world changes and cultures change the truth of the gospel will also change. Over the last 1,900 years the gospel has not changed (except in the dishonest and unscrupulous modern translations) and will not change until Christ comes again for His church. But, many teachers/preachers want us to believe that it has changed to accommodate modern morality and societies. Friends, it has not changed, nor will it change! Sin is still sin, hell is still hot and eternity is forever.

If one person believes the Bible, as it is written and a different person wants some modern ideas of subjectiveness in their religion it might be said that it is okay for them to have what they want. If one wants the use of mechanical instruments of music in worships saying that it is both modern and enjoyable, sadly many would not oppose this false doctrine. Where is the verse of scripture which allows mechanical instruments of music? There is not a single verse in the New Testament so authorizing. Not one verse. Ephesians 5:19 begins with the word “Speaking.” We should all be wise enough to know instruments cannot speak, instruments cannot teach (Col 3:16). Truth is not subjective, it is objective.

If one person believes that baptism is not essential for salvation does his belief negate the plain passages of scripture declaring baptism for the remission of sins as a prerequisite for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21)? Truth is not subjective, it is objective.

The liberal, weak-kneed, subjective teachers in the modern church need to be opposed and corrected. Jesus taught the truth on this matter, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6). “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (Jn 16:13).

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Truth is knowable (5)

The apostle John had a lot to say about our ability to know the truth. The word “know” was used twenty-seven times in the book of 1 John (along with twelve more times in other forms of the word, i.e., knew, knoweth, known). Thirty-nine times in a short, five-chapter book making sure the reader understood that we can know the facts of Christ and salvation (KJV).

Some, even in the brotherhood, are teaching that truth is not an absolute. They are attempting to water down the pure gospel with tainted, human reason. We should never accept what a preacher or teacher says without verifying the statements with the word of God. The false teacher will be held accountable for his teaching, but more importantly, we will be held accountable for what we believe. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness (Rom 6:16)?

Many false teachers, even in the brotherhood, are the products of teachers and professors teaching a new, polluted hermeneutics. If they are not strong Bible students they can get caught up in liberal ideology just to get approval from their instructors. We simply cannot allow their contamination to affect our eternal reward. Check and verify everything you are taught. That means being the very best student of God’s word that you can be.

God wants you to know the truth. He expects you to know the truth. He demands you reject false teaching and false teachers at every turn. Only the truth will save your souls. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:32).

We have been blessed with God’s holy word (in reliable translations). The Bible contains light to direct us, food to support and comfort to cheer us. It is the traveler’s map and the pilgrim’s staff. It is the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword and the Christian’s character.

Sharpen your sword for the battle ahead. Your soul is worth the effort.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Obligatory matters (6)

Romans 14 teaches the reader that there are some things in which we have the right to exercise our own personal judgment. In matters of opinion, we must be gracious enough to grant that others may have a differing opinion than the one that we hold. It appears that in the church of Christ in Rome there were some strong Christians and some weak Christians (just like every congregation on earth today). They came from several different backgrounds. Those Christians with a Jewish heritage would have a problem with eating meats. The Gentile Christians would not. It was a matter of opinion and Paul was stressing kindness and tolerance in such situations.

On the other hand, there are many spiritual matters in which one must be doctrinally correct. Faith which is based on Bible knowledge is fundamental and obligatory (Heb 11:6). God has never wanted blind faith. He has always shown evidence sufficient to warrant faith. That evidence for this age is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Faithful men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost to record for all humanity to know what God demands from us (2 Pet 1:21).

Repentance is obligatory. It is not a matter of opinion. It is not an option. We must turn away from our sins and stop doing them. The very definition of the word repent is *to think differently*. We have not repented of our sins if we keep doing those sins.

Confession is obligatory. When Philip preaches Christ to the eunuch from Africa the preaching was so strong that the one being taught commanded the chariot to be stopped and wanted his baptism right there, right then. Before he went down into the water to have his past sins washed away, he stated these powerful words, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

Baptism is obligatory. Because it is the act of baptism that actually moves us from one world (darkness) into another world (light) (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; 1 Pet 3:21). No one can be saved if they reject the obligatory matters.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Only one baptism (7)

There are several baptisms mentioned in the New Testament (e.g., the baptism of Moses, 1 Cor 10:1-3; the baptism of John, Mark 1:4; the baptism of fire, Matt 3:11, 12, etc.), but by the time Paul was inspired to write the letter to the church of Christ in Ephesus (near the middle of the first century) there was one and only one relevant baptism (cf Eph 4:5).

That one baptism that Paul writes of has some specific requirements to make it acceptable in God's sight. The very first requirement is to know why your baptism is necessary. Before baptism we are shrouded in our past sins. Jesus, as the Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29), gave His sinless body as a substitute for our sinful condition. Romans 6:1-6 tells us we are baptized into His death so we can be raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

That one baptism requires the right element, water. The eunuch said, "See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized" (Acts 8:37)? We can see in that same scripture that the one baptism was immersion. Verse 38 says, "...and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." The one baptism requires a going down into the water. That eliminates sprinkling, pour or any other non-biblical mode men can invent.

That one, singular baptism requires the right subject. A penitent believer in Jesus Christ is the only candidate for the one baptism. Babies are not candidates for baptism because they cannot believe, neither can they repent. The truth is they have nothing to repent of, yet. People who are 'baptized' into a denomination are not partakers of the one baptism. A person cannot be taught wrong and baptized right! The truth is that you may have joined a denomination (none of which are authorized by scriptures) but you have not been added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47) until you are scripturally (properly) baptized.

The one, true baptism is an act of obedience by the name (the authority) of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, which brings that person into salvation (Acts 2:38).

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Only one church (8)

In a world full of religious confusion, it might sound strange for a person to hear that there is only one authorized church mentioned in the Bible. When Jesus promised to build His church, He stated that fact in the singular (as in only one, not in the plural, as in many) (Matt 16:18, 19). The apostles preached the gospel for the first time in its entirety in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:14ff).

Because of that simple, yet powerful message some three thousand souls were added to the church that very day (Acts 2:47). The church Jesus died to establish had its beginning exactly fifty days after that Passover meal Jesus shared with His disciples. Fifty days after that last feast of Passover that Jesus observed would have been Pentecost. The Bible is very specific about the establishment of the one church.

Any church founded on any other day than that specific day that Luke records in Acts 2 cannot be the church Jesus promised to build. The prophet Isaiah told us where the Lord's church was to be established (the city of Jerusalem, Isaiah 2:1-3). If you are a member of a religious organization that got its start somewhere other than in the city Jerusalem and at any other time than on that first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection your church cannot be the church Jesus promised to build.

There is not a single denomination mentioned in the pages of God's holy book. The very word 'denomination' carries with it the idea of dividing. Denominations divide, yet Jesus prayed for unity of His followers (Jn 17:21). Paul said there is only one body and only one faith (Eph 4:4, 5).

The clarion call of the gospel needs to ring loudly throughout the land. Obeying the gospel (believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized) is the only way one can enter into the one true church. No one has ever become a member of a denomination as the result of obeying the word of God.

The uniqueness of the one, true church is so significant that Jesus purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Every denomination on earth robs Jesus of the glory of His purchase. One is not as good as another.

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SWORD SHARPERES

The Word (9)

John, the apostle, records these words at the very beginning of his account of Jesus' life, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). Jesus Christ (the Word) was part of the godhead long before He became Jesus (the babe born in Bethlehem) or the Christ (the Messiah) at His sacrifice almost 2,000 years ago.

These amazing opening verses of the book of John reveal that the Word existed before anything was created. Notice the use of the past tense verb "was," which is used three times in the first verse of John 1. "In the beginning WAS the Word," "the Word WAS with God," and "the Word WAS God" (Emphasis added, jb).

The acting force of creation was the Word (the second member of the godhead). There was a time when nothing existed but the godhead. All other things, without exception, that were created, or came into existence, they came to be via the creative power of the Word (Jn 1:3). With this basic fact in hand, we can extrapolate the creation (the source) of the one, true church which came from the same source as all other things, the Word (Matt 16:13-19; Eph 5:23-32).

The Word (Jesus Christ) did not create the tens of thousands of denominations plaguing our world today. They all come from a multiplicity of human source and each of them are far inferior, in every way, to the Word and the one true church He established by His power. There is also a real and present danger of the deadly and diabolical religion of Islam. That religion is not from God. In fact, the leader of that religion (Muhammad) rejected Jesus as God's Son. How could rational people follow a man-made religion that rejects the creator of all things?

The Word is the source of all light, material light and spiritual light. "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (Jn 1:5). How sad it is that The Word loved mankind so much that He died for us, tasted death for us, but so very few reciprocate the love of "The Word."

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WORD SHARPENERS

Respect for authority (10)

In an ever-changing world we can take great comfort in knowing that God does not change (“For I am the LORD, I change not...” Mal 3:6) and Christ does not change (“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” Heb 13:8).

We need to never change our respect for the authority of the scriptures. The written word of God is the final and complete authority for human actions and reactions (2 Tim 3:16, 17; Jude 3). The word of God is living and powerful and we must never ignore the words or tamper with the sacred message.

We are warned early in the scriptures not to add to or take away from what is written: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deut 4:2). As added emphasis to the seriousness of such sin to God’s word as adding and taking away from it inspiration repeats the warning near the end of scriptures, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18, 19). Yet, many well-meaning brethren insist on using versions that change the words to mean something they were never intended to mean (fornication changed to sexual immorality; virgin changed to young woman, etc.) or leave out entire verses (Acts 8:37; Mark 16:9-20; etc.). This is exactly what scriptures warns us about.

How can we encourage Christians to respect God’s word as the final authority if they choose to use a version that is corrupted or incomplete to start with?

The word of God does not evolve with time and culture, it is finished, settled and perfect (1 Cor 13:10) for our every need.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

You can't judge me (11)

We have heard people use this very statement when they are confronted with sin in their lives. They will then use Matthew 7:1 as a “proof” text. Jesus said, “Judge not that ye be not judged.” This verse is taken out of context and made to say something that Jesus never taught. It is one of the most misused verses in the Bible (some others are Eph 2:8; Rev 2:10; etc.)

The context of Matthew 7:1 not only supports the judging of others, but actually requires judging to be done. The first twenty verses of Matthew 7 gives the Bible reader resources to make proper judgement on those around us. The serious Bible student knows that one passage of scripture will never contradict another passage of scripture. Jesus said in John 7:24, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement.”

Judging hypocritically is condemned in Matthew 7:1, but that verse does not supersede other plain passages that require Christians to judge. The greatest portion of Mathew 7 deals with judgement on false teachers. How would we know if a teacher was spreading error if we did not examine, or judge, their words? Verse 15 of Matthew 7 begins with, “Beware of false prophets...” That requires judgement.

We have false teachers within the Lord's church. We know this by what they teach (Matt 7:16). Brethren, there are no innocent false teachers. They know they are teaching error. They know they are misrepresenting the truth. They know they are compromising the purity of the gospel. That is why Jesus warns us about their coming to us in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). They are going to look good, they are going to smell good, they are going to appear to be just like us, but they are working for the devil. Do not be fooled. If it is not sound, simple doctrine, it is of the devil.

God gave mankind a simple gospel. Paul said with reference to false teachers, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). Every person I have ever heard make the statement, “you can't judge me” was defending sin that they knew was in their life.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

Our God is a Consuming Fire (12)

The Bible has a great deal to say about the goodness, love, kindness, grace and mercy of God. There are some qualities of God's character that are poured out on mankind in general. "...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45). Then there are other attributes of God that are reserved for those who make the decision to follow Him, as listed above.

Hebrews 12:29 reads, "For our God is a consuming fire." Just two chapters earlier the inspired writer of Hebrews recorded, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). What do you fear? These Hebrew Christians were being shown that their eternal salvation was weighing in the balance. They could either continue down the proper path, or they could allow the cares and trials of this life to side track them. Off on the sidetrack means eternal death. It did for them and it will for us.

As Paul wrote to the church of Christ in Rome, he had this "consuming fire" in mind when he penned, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom 11:22). Never assume that God is going to be lenient on pseudo-Christians and those Christians who lack discipline and commitment. If you dedicate your life in devotion and faithfulness to Him He will shower you with grace, mercy, love and kindness, both now and in the world to come. If you reject Him and His commandments now, if you do not take your Christianity seriously, if you think you can play-act your way through this life and be good on the other side you will know, first hand, what a consuming fire means.

How many people of Noah's day never contemplated God as a consuming fire (Gen 6)? Priests, like Nadab and Abihu, did not take serving God specifically as He wanted found out immediately what the consuming fire meant (Lev 10:1, 2). They were priests, the sons of Aaron, and still had to obey His every command.

Our loving, compassionate, merciful Father is a consuming fire if we disobey Him.

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SWORD SHARPENERS

The sword of the Spirit (13)

The Bible has a lot to say about Christians being soldiers and fighters of the good fight of faith (soldiers, Phil 2:25; 2 Tim 2:3, 4; fighting, 1 Cor 9:28; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Heb 10:32, etc.). With so much biblical evidence of soldiering and fighting in the scriptures why do you think it is so hard to find Christians who are willing to fight? Who are willing to enter the fray. Who will defend what we know the Bible to teach?

Do we think fighting is wrong? Do we think defending the pure, simple gospel is beneath us? When Jude wrote, "...it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), he wanted Christians to unsheathe their swords and go to battle to defend "the faith."

Paul encouraged Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith..." (1 Tim 6:12). If Paul were writing to us, what would he tell us to do? He would say, "FIGHT!" Do not give in to error. Do not compromise truth. Do not go along to get along. Fight like you are the third monkey on the ramp going to Noah's ark and it just started raining. Fight with every bit of energy you have. Fight with every ounce of integrity you have. God deserves that, Christ deserves that and the gospel needs that.

Jesus taught, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:32). If a person rejects the truth of God's word, if they refuse to obey, they will be lost (2 Thess 1:7-9). That is what the Bible says and that is what people need to hear. Jesus did not soften His message. He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk 16:16).

It is past time we understand that the sword is not a toy. It is a weapon of war. It is recorded that Alexander Campbell said that Jesus unsheathed His sword on the banks of the river Jordan and threw the scabbard away. He knew He was in for a constant, continuous battle with Satan. If Jesus unsheathed His sword, why should we?

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