Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Believer's Armor: God's Provision for Your Protection
Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-17; Luke 4:2; Luke 22:44
Code: P14

Introduction

The Christian life is a battle. It is warfare on a grand scale.

Jesus' ministry began with a battle against Satan that lasted forty days (Luke 4:2). As Jesus' ministry drew to an end, Satan besieged Him again in theGardenofGethsemane. He hit Him with such force that our Lord sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Those two accounts alone teach us that the battle may not become easier as we grow in obedience to God. If anything, Satan will intensify his efforts against those who continue effectively serving the Lord. But God has not left us defenseless.

When the apostle Paul first went toEphesusto preach the gospel, he faced immediate opposition. He was run out of the synagogue by unbelieving Jewish leaders (Acts 19:8-9), mimicked by apostate Jewish exorcists (vv. 13-16), and threatened by silversmiths, whose idol-making business was suffering because of Paul's ministry (vv. 23-40).

Paul knew that where the greatest spirit-ual challenge lied was also likely to be the great-est danger and opposition. Many pastors are tempted to leave their ministry when things become difficult. But an easy ministry may be a weak one; because where the Lord's work is genuinely being done Satan will not fail to oppose it. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are not only God's children and servants but also His sol-diers--and a soldier's job is to fight the enemy.

Paul closed his letter to the Ephesians by giving them--and us--the warning and encour-agement we need. In Ephesians 6:10-13 Paul out-lines the essential truths about the believer's warfare.

The Believer's Warfare

The Preparation: Strength in the Lord

Preparation is basic to living an effective Christian life. The strength of the Christian life is depending on God--on being "strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (v. 10).

Any other strength proves to be impotent. Our own strength is never enough to oppose Satan, but when we are strong in the Lord, even a little of His strength is sufficient to win any battle. Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). It is not the amount of strength we have that's important--only its source.

To the extent that a Christian is strong in the Lord, his victory is guaranteed over the worst Satan has to offer. We are in a war--a terrible and fierce war--but have no reason to be afraid if we are on the Lord's side. Appropriation of that strength comes through what the Puritans referred to as "the means of grace"--prayer, knowing Scripture, obeying it, and faith in the promises of God.

The Provision: The Armor of God

To take advantage of the strength of God's might, a believer must also "put on the full armor of God, so that [he] will be able to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:11). The Greek word translated "put on" *(enduo)* carries the idea of permanence. The full armor of God is not something to be put on and taken off occasionally but is something to be put on permanently.

When used in a military sense, the Greek word translated "stand firm" (*histemi*) refers to holding a critical position while under attack. Living an obedient, Spirit-empowered life is what enables us to stand firm.

The Enemy: Satan

Ephesians 6:11 says we are to "stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Satan is God's enemy; therefore he is our enemy. The only way he can attack God is through us. And we can be sure he will seek us out and attack us with his schemes.

The Greek word translated "schemes" is *methodia,* which gives us the English word *method.* It refers to craftiness, cunning, and deception. Satan's evil schemes are built around stealth and deception.

The apostle John summarized the devil's attack with this exhortation: "Do not love the world [Satan's present domain] nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father" (1 John 2:15-16).

The Battle: Against Demons

One of Satan's most effective strategies--and one of a believer's greatest dangers--is the delusion that no seriously threatening conflict between good and evil is raging in the invisible and supernatural realm. But that sort of thinking not only is naive but also leads to lethargy, indifference, and spiritual stagnation. The war between God and Satan has not diminished but intensified, and so has its front on this earth.

Ephesians 6:12 says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Paul reminded his readers that the Christian's strug-gle is against not only Satan himself, but also the host of his demon subordinates--a vast army of adversaries, who, like the devil, are not made of flesh and blood. Our greatest enemy is not the world we see, corrupt and wicked as it is, but the world we cannot see.

"Rulers...powers...world forces of this darkness...spiritual forces of wickedness" describe the different strata and rankings of those demons and the evil, supernatural empire in which they operate. Human beings who pro-mote paganism, the occult, and various other ungodly and immoral movements and programs are but the dupes of Satan and his demons. They are trapped by their sins and weaknesses into unwittingly helping to fulfill his schemes.

Each mention of those supernatural powers is preceded by "against," and each seems to represent a particular category of demonic activity or hierarchy. Paul's purpose, however, is not to explain the details of that hierarchy but to give us some idea of its sophistication and power. We are pitted against an incredibly evil, potent, and well-organized enemy. Our response should be to turn to God, who is our source of protection and victory.

Every believer has already experienced the surpassing greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe. "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph.1:19-20). The power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him in heaven is our power, bequeathed to us as joint heirs with Him.

The Victory: Standing Firm

Ephesians 6:13 says, "Take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." God gives no deferments or exemptions. His people are at war and will continue to be at war until He returns and takes charge of the earth. But even the most willing and eager soldier of Christ is helpless without God's provision. That is Paul's point: "Take up the *full* armor of God" (emphasis added). We have His provision in being His children, in having His

Word, in possessing His indwelling Holy Spirit, and of having every resource that our heavenly Father possesses. God is our strength, but His strength is appropriated only through obedience. His mighty armor must be put on (v. 11) and taken up (v. 13).

In the great spiritual warfare in which we do battle, we are called only to resist and stand firm. James said, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Peter counseled us to "be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The Believer's Armor

In Ephesians 6:14-17 Paul identifies six pieces of armor with which God supplies His children to withstand the onslaughts of Satan and the demons. The Greek word translated "having" (aorist tense) in verses 14-15 indicates that the first three pieces of armor are permanent. The believer is never to be without them. The phrase "in addition to all" in verse 16 introduces the last three pieces of armor. They are preceded by the Greek verbs translated "taking up" and "take," which implies they are to be kept always at hand to be used as soon as the actual fighting begins.

The Belt of Truth

Ephesians 6:14 says, "Stand firm there-fore, having girded your loins with truth." The Roman soldier wore a tunic, an outer garment that served as his primary clothing. It was usually made of a large, square piece of material with holes cut out for the head and arms. It draped loosely over most of the soldier's body. Since the majority of ancient combat was hand-to-hand, a loose tunic was a potential hindrance and even a danger. Before a battle it was therefore carefully cinched up between the soldier's legs and tucked into the heavy leather belt.

That belt demonstrates the believer's read-iness for war and stands for truth. The Greek word translated "truth" *(aletheia)* basically refers to the content of that which is true. Knowing the content of God's truth is absolutely essential for the believer if he is to battle successfully against the schemes of Satan. Without knowing basic biblical teaching, he is subject to being "carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

But *alethia* can also refer to the attitude of truthfulness. It represents not only the accu-racy of specific truths, but also the quality of truthfulness. That seems to be the primary mean-ing Paul has in mind here. To be girded with truth reveals an attitude of readiness and of genuine commitment. It is the mark of the sin-cere believer who forsakes hypocrisy. Every encumbrance that might hinder his work for the Lord is gathered and tucked into his belt of truthfulness so that it will be out of the way. Paul

said, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:4).

Being girded with truth is being renewed in mind and proving "what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). When you renew your mind by committing yourself to God's truth, you will become "a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (v. 1).

The Breastplate of Righteousness

No Roman soldier would go into battle without his breastplate--a tough sleeveless piece of armor that covered everything apart from his head and limbs. It was often made of leather or heavy linen, onto which were sewn overlapping pieces of metal molded or hammered to conform to the body. The purpose of that piece of armor is obvious--to protect one's heart, lungs, intestines, and other vital organs.

The mind and the emotions are the two areas where Satan most fiercely attacks believers. He wants to cloud our minds with false doctrine, false principles, and false information to mislead and confuse us. He also wants to confuse our emotions and thereby pervert our affection, morals, loyalties, goals, and commitments. He desires to snatch the Word of God from our minds and replace it with his own perverse ideas. He seeks to undermine pure living and replace it with immorality, greed, envy, hate, and every other vice. He wants us to laugh at sin rather than mourn over it, and to rationalize it rather than confess it and bring it to the Lord for forgiveness. He seduces us to become so accustomed to sin in us and around us that it no longer disturbs us.

Our protection against such attacks is the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is to be taken and wrapped around our whole being, just as ancient soldiers covered themselves with armor breastplates.

Paul here is obviously not speaking of self-righteousness, which is not righteousness at all but the sin of pride. Nor is he speaking of imputed righteousness--the righteousness God applies to the account of every Christian the moment he believes in Christ (Romans 4:6, 11, 22-24). The breastplate of righteousness is the practical righteousness of moment-by-moment obedience to God's Word.

Our armor must include the breastplate of righteousness--the genuine holiness of him or her whose "every thought [is] captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5) and whose mind is set "on the things above, not on the, things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2).

The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Since the average ancient soldier marched on rough, hot roads, climbed over jagged rocks, trampled over thorns, and waded through streambeds of jagged stones, his feet needed much protection. A soldier whose feet were blistered, cut, or swollen could not fight well and often was not able to stand up--a perilous situation in battle. The shoes of Roman soldiers were usually impregnated with bits of metal or nails to give him greater traction as he climbed a slippery hill, and greater stability as he fought.

A Christian's spiritual footwear is equally important in his warfare against the schemes of the devil. If he has carefully girded his loins with truth and put on the breastplate of righteous-ness, but does not properly shod his feet with the "preparation of the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15), he is destined to stumble, fall, and suffer many defeats.

The Greek word translated "preparation" *(hetoimasia)* generally refers to readiness. A good pair of boots allowed the soldier to march, climb, fight, or do whatever else was necessary at a moment's notice. Christ demands the same readiness of His people.

In this passage "the gospel of peace" refers to the good news that believers are at peace with God. The unsaved person is helpless, ungodly, sinful, and an enemy of God (Romans5:6-10).The saved person, on the other hand, is reconciled to God through faith in His Son(Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

The gospel of peace is the marvelous truth that in Christ we are now at peace with God and are one with Him. Therefore, when our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, we stand in the confidence of God'slove for us, His union with us, and His commitment to fight for us.

The believer who stands in the Lord's power need not fear any enemy--even Satan himself. When he comes to attack us, our feet are rooted firmly on the solid ground of the gospel of peace, through which God changed from our enemy to our defender.

The Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:16 says, "In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." Roman soldiers used several kinds of shields. The kind Paul refers to here (Gk., *thureos)* was about two-and-a-half feet wide and high, designed to protect the entire body of the soldier. The shield was made of a solid piece of wood and was covered with metal or thick leather.

The faith Paul refers to here is faith in God, which is immeasurably more reliable than practical, everyday faith we live by. And it is far from being blind faith. Faith is only as reliable and helpful as the trustworthiness of its object. The Christian faith is infinitely powerful and because the object of faith is Jesus Christ, it is the infinite God. Our faith never falls because the One in whom our faith is placed never fails.

In New Testament times the tips of arrows would often be wrapped in pieces of cloth that had been soaked in pitch. Just before the arrow was shot, the tip would be lighted and the flaming missile would be shot at the enemy troops. The pitch burned fiercely, and on impact it would splatter flaming bits, igniting anything flammable in its path. In addition to piercing a person's body, such arrows inflicted serious burns on enemy soldiers and destroyed their clothing and gear. The most reliable protection against these flaming missiles was the *thureos*. Its covering of metal or treated leather would either deflect or extinguish them.

Satan continually bombards God's child-ren with the flaming arrows of immorality, hatred, anger, covetousness, pride, doubt, fear, despair, distrust, and other temptations. Every temptation, either directly or indirectly, tries to get us to doubt or distrust God. The purpose of Satan's missiles is to cause believers to forsake their trust in God, to drive a wedge between the Savior and the saved. Put up the shield of faith and that won't happen to you.

The Helmet of Salvation

The fifth piece of God's armor is repre-sented by the Roman soldier's helmet (Ephesians 6:17), without which he would never enter battle. Some of the helmets were made of thick leather covered with metal plates, and others were of heavy molded or beaten metal. They usu-ally had cheek pieces to protect the face.

The purpose of the helmet was to protect the head from injury, particularly from the dangerous broadsword commonly used in the war-fare of that day. It was not the much smaller sword mentioned later in verse 17, but a large, two-handed, double-edged sword (Gk., *rhomphaia*, cf. Revelation 1:16; 2:12; 6:8) that measured three to four feet in length. It was often carried by cavalrymen, who would swing at the heads of enemy soldiers to split their skulls or decapitate them.

That Paul relates the helmet to salvation indicates that Satan's blows are directed at the believer's security and assurance in Christ. The two dangerous edges of Satan's spiritual broadsword are discouragement and doubt. To discourage us, he points to our failures, our sins, our unresolved problems, our poor health, or to whatever else seems negative in our lives. He wants us to lose confidence in the love and care of our heavenly Father.

Doubt is what often brings about discouragement. Doubts about the truths of God, including doubt about one's salvation, are the worst sort of discouragements for a believer. If a believer doubts God's goodness or dependability, or if his relation to God seems uncertain, he has no ground for hope and therefore no protection from discouragement. The person who thinks he has nothing worthwhile to look forward to has no reason to fight, work, or live responsibly.

Since Paul is addressing believers, putting on the helmet of salvation cannot refer to receiving Christ as Savior. The only ones who can take up any piece of God's armor are those who are already saved.

The first aspect of salvation, justification, is a past reality. It was accomplished the moment we trusted in Christ. That particular act of faith need never be repeated because we are secure in our Father's hands, and no one can snatch us from there (John 10:28-29). We are forever saved from condemnation (Romans 8:1).

The second aspect of salvation, sanctification, involves our life on earth, during which we experience a measure of freedom from the dominating power of sin. Being now under God's grace, sin no longer has mastery or dominion over us. We are no longer a slave to sin but to God (Romans 6:14, 18-22).

The third aspect of salvation, glorification, is yet future. One day we shall be saved from sin's presence. Look-ing forward to that glorious time, John said, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that, when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

It is this final aspect of salvation that is the real strength of the believer's helmet. If we lack hope in the future promise of salvation, there can be no security in the present. That's why Paul called this same piece of armor "the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). In Romans 8:23-24 Paul explains further, "Having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved." The helmet of salva-tion is that great hope of final salvation that gives us confidence and assurance that our present struggle with Satan will not last forever. We *know* we will be victorious in the end!

The Sword of the Spirit

Paul concluded his treatise on God's armor by identifying the last piece: "the sword [Gk., *machaira*] of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). The *machaira* was any-where from six to eighteen inches. It was the common sword carried by Roman foot soldiers and was the principal weapon in hand-to-hand combat. Carried in a sheath or scabbard attached to their belts, it was

always at hand and ready for use.

The Greek phrase translated "of the Spirit" (*tou pneumatos*) can also be translated "by the Spirit" or "spiritual," referring to the nature of the sword rather than its source. From the context we know it is a spiritual weapon, to be used in our struggle against spiritual enemies. The same Greek phrase is translated "spiritual" in Ephesians 1:3 and 5:19. Although that meaning is perfectly consistent with the context of Ephesians 6:10-17, the preferred rendering is as a genitive of origin, "of the Spirit," indicating the Holy Spirit as the origin of the sword. As the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), the Holy Spirit is the believer's resident truth Teacher, who teaches us all things and brings God's Word to our remembrance (John 14:20).

Paul explicitly states that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. As such it is first of all a defensive weapon, capable of deflecting the blows of an opponent. It is the believer's supreme weapon of defense against the onslaught of Satan. However, unlike the shield, which gives broad and general protection, the sword can de-flect an attack only if it is handled with precision at close range. It must parry the enemy weapon exactly where the thrust is made. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, His defense for each temptation was a passage of Scripture that precisely contradicted the devil's word (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). The Christian who does not know God's Word well cannot use it well. Satan will invariably find out where we are ignorant or confused and attack us there. Scripture is not a broadsword (Gk., *rhomphaia*) to be waved indiscriminately, but a dagger to be used with great precision.

The sword of the Spirit is also an offen-sive weapon, capable of inflicting blows as well as deflecting those of the enemy. Scripture is "living and active and sharper than any two--edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

The Word of God is so powerful that it transforms men and women from the realm of falsehood to that of truth, from the realm of darkness to that of light, and from the realm of sin and death to that of righteousness and life. It changes sadness into joy, despair into hope, stag-nation into growth, childishness into maturity, and failure into success.

Every time God's Word leads a person to salvation is a demonstration of its power to cut a swath through Satan's dominion of darkness and bring light to a darkened soul. May you use that formidable weapon with great skill, as well as the other pieces of spiritual armor available to you, for the glory of God and the furthering of His kingdom.

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