

Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Strength, Part 4

Selected Scriptures

90-129

Tonight we return to a theme which we began in the message this morning on being strong in the Lord. If you'll open your Bibles, I trust, to the sixth chapter of Ephesians and we'll look together to the Word of God. The Bible has so much to say to us of great import for our lives and this passage ranks among the very most important in the life of a believer.

As we said this morning, one of the attitudes that the church must have is courage, fortitude, spiritual strength, the ability to stand firm in the midst of the challenges and difficulties that come against us. Spiritual strength, crucial to the life of the church. And as we continue in our study of the anatomy of the church, it's crucial for us to understand the role that strength plays and what it means to be a strong believer.

Last Sunday we addressed the issue of being strong in the midst of our human weakness, and this week we're looking at being strong in the midst of the onslaughts of Satan and the kingdom of darkness. Let me read you the first few verses of our text, Ephesians 6:10 through 13. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For 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 heavenlies. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

That introduces us to this whole matter of spiritual strength in the context of Satan's endeavors against us. We are to be strong. In order to be strong against the principalities and the powers as they are often called, against the rulers and the powers of the demonic world, we have to be armed with the armor of God.

This morning we talked about the fact that Satan develops schemes, carries those schemes out to a force of a demons that work their will in the unregenerate world system. The world system as 1 John 5:19 tells us is in control of Satan. The whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one, or the evil one. Satan is the god of this age, the prince of this world and he has orchestrated a deceptive antigod/antichrist campaign through the human world system. We as Christians are under assault by that system. And I pointed out this morning that it isn't that we are being assaulted so much directly by demons who come and live in us or come and work their work somehow in our minds, but rather that the demonic system assaults us through the world around us, through the temptations of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life that come to us through the character of the world in which we live. It appears to us on the surface to be a very human problem. We are dealing with philosophies and psychologies and moralities, or the lack of them. We are dealing with tolerances and attitudes that come to us on a human level because they come to us through human beings and human systems, governments and moral systems and education and so forth. But the

reality is, they are the schemes of Satan developed by him in the counsel of his own fallen polluted mind and carried out through his massive network of demons and brought upon man as human systems only in the end. And they are set to destroy the work of God.

And I told you this morning and I repeat again that the whole endeavor of this world system is against Christ, against the people of God. The evil of the system and the work of the Satan is not against ungodly people. Satan is not attacking unregenerate people, they're already on his side. The whole system has been developed to assault those of us who know and love Jesus Christ.

So here we are in the midst of a world that has been so designed by Satan to do everything it can to destroy us. It calls for tremendous strength. To be able to stand against the wiles, or the schemes of the devil, to be able to stand against his subtle craftiness, his cunning takes a tremendous amount of preparation. And what is that preparation? Well according to this passage it is the full armor of God.

Let me read to you what is included in that armor starting in verse 14. "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit..." We'll stop at that point.

There is the armor of the Christian. And I remind you again that verse 11 says, "Put on the full armor of God," and verse 13 says, "Take up the full armor of God." Twice we are commanded to defend ourselves against this onslaught by being prepared with the armor of God. It will enable us, verse 11 says, to stand firm. It will enable us, verse 13 says, to resist in the evil day and having done everything to stand firm. And again in verse 14, to stand firm for the third time in just a few verses. The whole idea is to be able to stand in the middle of this assault.

In order to do that effectively you must take on the full armor of God. And as I suggested to you this morning, it is not to be solved politically, this whole issue is not to be solved even by some corporate strategy, it is not to be solved by some assault on demons or on Satan himself, but rather if we're going to be able to handle the tremendous attacks of Satan that come through the world system we have to deal with our own lives by making sure we are armed for the war.

Let's talk about that armor. It's very practical. And as I mentioned this morning, Paul has in mind a Roman soldier. And what you see here typically is the basic outfit that a Roman soldier engaged in battle would have. He would have a belt to wrap around his loins. He would have a breastplate to protect his vulnerable chest area. He would have the right kind of shoes to engage in hand-to-hand combat. He would have a shield and he would have a helmet to protect his head and he would have a sword to engage in the battle. That's the image in Paul's mind. The spiritual implications are profound for all of us.

Let's start, first of all, where Paul starts in verse 14. The first thing you need to know if you're going to be in this battle and be able to stand is that you have to have your loins girded with truth. This is the belt. Your loins, your mid-section and a Roman soldier would start in the matter of arming himself for the battle by putting a belt on, a soldier's belt to which could be attached his breastplate

which would be over his shoulders and connected to that belt, a belt to which would be attached a sheath or a place to put his sword. And more than that, the belt served him in another purpose. The belt could be cinched tight and the corners of his tunic pulled up through that belt. You remember in ancient times they wore basically what amounts to a dress, a piece of material with a hole in it for the head and two holes for the arms and you just kind of put it on. And when you went out to battle, you certainly didn't want to go out to battle with your dress blown around. Somebody might pull it over your head and ya-ha, it's curtains, you know. And you certainly didn't want to get your arms tangled in your dress or your tunic. You wanted to make sure as you got into the battle that you had everything pulled in very tightly. And typically they would pull up the corners of that tunic and make it into some kind of a mini-tunic so they could move with some alacrity and some agility in the hand-to-hand combat in which they were engaged. And if needed, they could dodge and run and move.

To look at the belt is to understand something very basic to warfare. And in Paul's imagery he calls it the belt of truth. It might be better even to translate that word truthfulness. And I don't think he's so much talking about content. I don't think he's talking about biblical doctrine. He gets to that when he gets to what weapon? The sword. What he's talking about here is truthfulness in the sense of dedication. It really is the idea of sincerity. It's the idea of going into the battle with a view toward the seriousness of what you're engaged in and making a real commitment to it...a sincere desire to contend, a sincere desire to pull all the loose ends of your life in.

Peter has that in mind. Peter talks about girding up your loins. In other words, pulling in the loose ends of your life if you're really going to engage seriously in battle. In verse 13 of 1 Peter 1, "Gird your minds for action." Keep sober, or get your priorities right. Pull in the loose ends of your life and make a real commitment to the battle.

And anybody in any kind of endeavor like this knows that victory first begins with a commitment to win...total heart, soul, mind commitment to win. And I suppose it might be safe to say that most Christians lose the spiritual war at this point and it's simply because winning isn't that important to them. They're content to lose. When you want to win more than you want anything else, you've got a fighting chance. Anything less than that and you're liable to be trampled. There has to be a heart attitude of a champion, of a winner that says...I have fixed my hope on the future, I have fixed my hope on the eternal reward, I want Christ to be glorified in my life, I want righteousness to prevail, I want to be useful to God, I want to be as useful as I can possibly be. That's the kind of commitment we're talking about. It's that kind of commitment, I think, in another context that Paul talks about in Romans 12 where he talks about presenting your body as a living sacrifice, getting to the place where you make the ultimate sacrifice of all your own desires and your own wishes and your own will and your own way in the course that you might lay out for your own life and you submit it all to God. It's a sort of abandoning yourself and getting all your priorities in the right place, committing yourself to the Lord. That's where the whole thing really starts.

And I can promise you, you're not going to win in this spiritual warfare until winning is really important to you. And how does it become important to you? When you understand what's at stake, when you understand that eternal reward is at stake, when you understand that the eternal glory of the Lord Jesus is at stake, when you understand that usefulness in the kingdom is at stake for you, when you understand that the souls of people are at stake. Paul says that to Timothy when he tells Timothy, "Look, why am I beating my body? Why am I exercising self-discipline?" Because, he says in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy, "We're dealing with something that has eternal consequences." This is not trivial stuff. This is a warfare with immense consequences. The souls of people are at stake here,

eternal rewards are at stake, the glory of Christ, the honor of Christ...very compelling issues.

Some people will give themselves greatly for the love of their country. There was a time, I think, in America when that was the case. Somehow that got destroyed in the malay of the Korean...of the Vietnam war. I wonder now if we could even in years to come amass an army of people who would be willing to give their life for their country. I suppose in some ways it's good that we can fire weaponry at people and don't have to engage them in combat because I wonder whether people would give their life the way they once did. But there was a time when people took the noble route and were willing to die for their country, and you and I and many people who don't appreciate it are living in the freedoms that those people purchased for us. There are people who would give their life for the right because there is a noble cause. There are people who will sacrifice greatly for something less than a noble cause, but something they believe in.

I always think about that when I watch football players in the National Football League get hit hard and become quadriplegics and ask myself...how important is that, is it that important? For some people I guess it is. It's amazing that the almost limitless degree to which people might go for something they feel is important. And that's the question that starts the whole issue of spiritual victory in your life.

I remember when I was student in college I had a friend, we were in the Orange County Invitational, track meet, thirty-five colleges and universities were participating. And I was basically a baseball player in the spring, and a football player in the winter semester. But they wanted me to run track because I could run pretty fast. And so we had this big track meet and I was involved in the track meet and I ran the sprint races and then I had to run the mile relay, the four-by-four hundred, they call it, and run one circuit and pass the baton and...I had a friend who ran in that team with me and he was having a bad day. We were both involved in the long jump and he crow hopped six times, that's all the jumps you have. And what that means is he missed the board, he was over the board all six times. That's pretty hard to do. It means you're not really very focused. And so I was a little bit worried about his concentration that day.

Well we got into the finals of the Orange County Invitational with all these universities and we had an opportunity to win because we had a fairly good team, relay team. I ran second man, it's because it works like this...first man gets the lead, second man loses it, you have two to make it up. So I ran second man. And our first guy went out and we...he ran a great leg, and he came in and we made a perfect baton pass in the lane, between the lines, and I flew out of there and frankly I ran the best leg I'd ever run in my life and I came in holding first place. And we were really where we needed to be because we had a great third leg, my friend, Ted, and we had a blur for an anchor. And if we could just hold close we could win it. I made the pass to Ted, perfect pass again and he was still in the lead when we left...when he left the passing lane and we were really excited. The place was screaming and roaring, and all these people filling the stands. And Ted went down, turned the curve, came down the back stretch, stopped...walked off the track and sat on the grass. The race was over, we were done. Our great anchor never got a baton, never ran.

I was so stunned and always verbal and always, you know, sort of the leader. I just bolted across the grass to the middle of the field where he was sitting and I said, "What happened?" I thought he must have torn his hamstring, or popped a panteras(?) or gotten spiked or whatever. I'll never forget what he said. He looked up and said to me, "I don't know, I just didn't feel like running." You know, you can hardly contain yourself at a moment like that, you know. Your first reaction is to take off your

track shoe and bury it, you know, in his back or the...ha... It's absolutely inconceivable. We were done.

It's a terrible thing when something that matters to people doesn't matter to you. And if you're a part of a team, the fact that it doesn't matter to you can effect a lot of folks. If you think that's bad in a track meet, understand how bad it would be in hand-to-hand combat if you were surrounded by people who had no commitment to victory and consequently multiplied your vulnerability. I mean, this whole thing of spiritual war starts with commitment. And I'm not trying to give you a pep talk, I'm just trying to tell you the fact that until you get a grip on eternal things, until you set your affection on things above and not on things on the earth, until you offer your body as a living sacrifice, until the purposes of God matter more to you than your own goals and ambitions, until the eternal glory is the compelling issue in your life and not worldly comfort, you're not going to get the belt on, pull the loose ends of your life in, make a commitment to battle that can turn out in victory. That's where it starts.

Secondly, in verse 14 Paul looks at this image of this Roman soldier who is so prepared for war and he sees a breastplate of righteousness. Now breastplates in ancient times could be made out of thick leather. They could be made out of some configuration of leather and metal, as you have perhaps seen. Sometimes you've even seen pictures of Roman soldiers who had that great eagle on a brass plate that was molded and cast and placed over their chest, a very formidable kind of protection. There have been all different kinds that have been used. But those breastplates were absolutely crucial because what they did was they covered the vital organs. And you could get in to hand-to-hand combat and somebody might whack you in the arm or somebody might poke you in the shoulder, somebody might get a shot at your leg somewhere and you could survive. But if they start poking around in here, you're in some real serious trouble. The vital part needed protection. Sometimes they even used very heavy linen and overlapping iron. Sometimes they put pieces of animal horn on there to act as a barrier. And no soldier would go out in to hand-to-hand combat without the protection that was needed in that area.

Now what is the image that Paul sees here translating into in terms of the spiritual dimension? Well it's a very simple thing. It's a matter of protecting the vital areas of your life with the breastplate of...what?...of righteousness. What is that? That's simply doing what's right...doing what's right. It's the same kind of righteousness of which Paul spoke to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:11 when he said, "Flee from these things...sinful things, all the things involved with the love of money...flee from these things, you man of God, and follow after righteousness and godliness." If you're not living righteously, you have immense vulnerability. You are really vulnerable. You are exposed. If there is a pattern of wickedness in your life, if there's a pattern of sin...in the words of 2 Corinthians 2:11...an advantage has been taken of you by Satan. He has the advantage if there is sin in your life.

And by that I'm not saying that you need to be perfect, but I am saying you need to deal with sin. That's why in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 1 Paul says, "Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And if you're not dealing with the sin in your life and endeavoring to walk in a godly manner and in a righteous manner, you are exposed and your vital area is wide open to the assaults of the enemy. If you're not living a righteous life and Satan comes at you with this formidable array of temptations that he has built into the human system and they can all walk right across those bridges into an open door...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Don't have any partnership, says 2 Corinthians 6:14, with unrighteousness, don't have any partnership with lawlessness. Don't have any fellowship with darkness. It just creates terrible vulnerability.

You say, "Well what if there's sin in my life?" Well the thing to do is to confess your sin and the Lord is faithful and just to...what?...forgive it. Confront it, deal with it honestly, openly, turn from it. Second Timothy 2:22, "Flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness." Call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

You see, the thing that elevates your vulnerability in the spiritual war is sin. And if there is a pattern of sin in your life, you're not going to have the victory. You are weak, you are not strong. On the other hand, as formidable as Satan is, as scheming and cunning and crafty as he is, as sophisticated as the wickedness of the world system is, as inundating and overpowering as it is, if you're walking in a righteous pattern and dealing with the sins that come up in your life and pursuing holiness with all your might, Satan cannot strike a fatal blow. He cannot strike a fatal blow. Live a pure life or you're going to be a defeated soldier and you're going to cease to be useful, you're going to cease to be blessed, you're going to cease to be a glory to the Lord and you're going to forfeit an eternal reward. Pursue righteousness, that's what protects your vital areas.

Now there's a third component here and I think this is a very, very graphic one as well, in verse 15. He says, "Have your feet shod." Have some shoes on. And what are these shoes called? Well they're called the preparation of the gospel of peace. And what does it mean? Well, the word "preparation" simply means prepare your feet...prepare your feet with the proper shoes. And what are they? They are the shoes called the gospel of peace. It's an important piece of armor.

I can remember in my athletic career how important it was to have the right kind of shoes. You went from one sport to the other and any time you were engaged in any kind of active sport, you had to have the right kind of shoes to grip the ground so that you had total control of your body when it was in motion. If it was baseball, you had a certain kind of spike on the shoe, a certain kind of cleat to enable you to do what you needed to do and to keep your footing. If it was basketball, you had a certain kind of shoe. If it was tennis...whatever it was...that was designed to help you to be able to stand and to flex and to move and have total control of your body and not lose your balance or slip and slide. And, of course, it was never more necessary than it was in football.

I remember one...I don't know why I think back to all these old parts of my life...but I remember one day we were playing a football game when I was in my college days, we were playing a football game in the Rosebowl. We played a number of times there and I was the guy who returned kickoffs, to start with, and I was back and the kickoff came and the field was in really poor condition. It had rained a lot and, of course, when it rains a lot...they're more sophisticated now with what they can do...but in those days they just sprayed green paint on the dirt. So the field had been worn down and it was painted green but there wasn't much footing. And I had come out with short...short cleats on my football shoes, rather than mud cleats because the mud cleats slowed me down and I thought I'd try the short ones and see if I could get away with it...not realizing what might happen. Caught the kick, took one step and landed on my southern hemisphere in front of everyone in a perfect sitting position. For some reason that was an unforgettable moment as I looked up, surrounded by twenty-one players and stands full of people seeing me sit all by myself without ever being hit by anyone. I look back on that as...from that time, of course, I went immediately off the field and got to the equipment guy and put long spikes on my shoes.

I guess the irony of that was, that was the last game, I think it was the last football I played, it was a bowl game at the end of the year, and it was such a monumental moment that those shoes, which

were scarred up after a whole season of football, and were most notable because they had these very long cleats...I had the guy put the longest ones he had over there on them. And for some strange reason they became sort of a collector's item in my family and my mother did something with them that only a mother would do, she had them bronzed. Can you believe that? I have in my house those shoes in bronze with those long cleats as a reminder that you don't go into battle without having your feet properly shod. I suppose she asked my father if this could serve as a spiritual illustration that might help me in my future life.

And so they sit there on my fireplace hearth as a reminder to make sure your feet are properly prepared. And there is a spiritual lesson there and that's exactly the case here. In fact, what the Roman soldiers used to do was they developed what was called a hobnailed boot. Very simple to make, you put a leather soul on it and you hammer nails through the leather souls so that they stick out the bottom, short stubby nails. Why? Because they were on ground, they were on dirt, or some kind of grass, on a field somewhere it and it would be a very, very good idea to have some kind of shoe that would give you a grip because you were literally in hand-to-hand combat. They had their feet prepared to go into this war, to go into this combat. And if they didn't, they would be slipping and sliding and very ineffective and very vulnerable.

And I love what it says in verse 15, here's what makes up your shoes, "The gospel of peace...the gospel of peace." Now I've heard a lot of preachers talk about this but I don't think they very often get it right because almost every time I've ever heard a preacher refer to this they say that we take our feet and preach the gospel...blessed are the feet of those who publish the good news. That's not what it's talking about here. It's not talking about feet going somewhere, it's talking about feet doing...what?...standing firm. This is not evangelistic feet, folks. This is not the beautiful feet of those who preach the good news. This is the feet of those who are under assault in the spiritual war. And with these feet you hold your ground and you take your firm grip and you stand against Satan and you don't run, and you're at perfect balance as he comes at you and your feet are on solid ground and they're anchored. And what is it that anchors us? It is the gospel of peace.

Now what does that mean? It means this, it means the gospel is that we have made peace with whom? With God, that's the good news, right? The good news is we have peace with God. And so I stand my ground. Why? Because I have made peace with God which means God is on my side and that's why I can stand my ground. And when Satan comes at me, I just say, "God, get him." When the temptations come, when the world attacks, "God, I have made my peace with You through the gospel, You're on my side, I need Your strength." That's essentially what you have in verse 10, "Be strong in...whom?...in the Lord and in the strength of His might."

An illustration of this that I draw also from my youth. I was a junior high student, I was at North Downey Junior High, rough place...rough junior high. When I was a junior high kid, that was a rough junior high. We had a parking lot for the kids that drove to school...some of them were twenty years old...still in the eighth grade, it was a tough place. That was the first time I ever ran into marijuana...used to put it on the fuse box in the boy's bathroom lit and guys would go in and take a drag on it. I mean, that's a long time ago but that was there. There were some gangs in the area even then...it was a tough junior high. And this may sound like a sort of a strange thing, but for some reason this rough gang took out their hostilities on me, on one occasion. I was in my wood shop and I was sanding something and one of them threw a piece of wood across real hard and split my head open, had to go and have it sewed up.

I had a little friend whose name was Roger and he was just a little guy...just a very little kind of a...looked like the Pillsbury dough boy, just a little, kind of roly-poly little guy who looked like he was too young to be in junior high. And Roger and I were friends and for some reason they got a lot of pleasure out of picking on the two of us. I was somewhat smaller in my junior high times and Roger was my little buddy and we went to church together. My dad was a pastor at the First Baptist Church of Downey at that time. And these guys would pick on us. And they got a lot of pleasure out of that. They would knock the books out from under your arm, or trip you, or something like that. And one day in the locker room at gym they shoved us over the locker bench and hit our heads on the lockers. On one occasion they actually beat up Roger.

Well Roger had a brother named Steve. I'll never forget him. He was the middle linebacker for Long Beach State. So Roger said to me one day, "I'm going to tell my brother." So he did. There was one guy who was kind of the leader of the gang, his name was John Ellerbe(?), I'll never forget him. And Roger, he had had it with this and so he told his brother. His brother was a huge guy. And he came to school one day in the early morning, before class. And he was standing around the corner from the gym where this group of people congregated. And Roger...and I was kind of trailing him...walked up and Roger said something, "Hey, you guys," and they just started laughing and laughing. And while they were laughing his brother Steve walked out from behind the corner of the gym and just stood there and said, "Which one, Roger?" And Roger said, "That one." I'll never forget it...I will never forget it.

Steve walked over to this guy who was shaking and just drilled him and put out his teeth, picked him up, threw him over the hedge against the wall of the building and down behind the hedge he fell. And then Steve said, "Don't anybody ever touch these guys again." And you know what? On that campus Roger ruled. He could go anywhere and do anything. And I stayed right behind him.

It's a funny story in a way. It ended sadly. That guy John, I remember reading in the paper, in my high school days was killed in a barroom fight. But I look back on that and I say it's really good to have somebody real big and real strong to back you up in the battle. And that's what it means to have your feet shod with the gospel of peace. You've made your peace with God, He's on your side, He's there as your great defender. And all you have to do is call out in the time of the battle and He'll be there to deliver His strength. Don't try to fight it on your own. Call on Him and He'll come to your rescue.

Listen to 1 John 4:4, "You are from God, little children," isn't that great? "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them." Why? "Because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." Cap your divine resource, the victory is yours if you just call upon God and His strength.

You say, "What does that mean?" Just cry out in the midst of the onslaught, "Strengthen me, O Lord, come to my rescue." Just like the psalmist did many, many times.

Well, let's keep moving. Verse 16, in addition to all, on top of everything else, take the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. Take the shield of faith because it will extinguish missiles. This shield in the Roman time was about four feet by two and a half feet, four feet high and two and a half feet wide. And soldiers would get behind them literally. Sometimes when an army moved like a phalanx, that's a long sort of group, sort of stretched out across the countryside, moving like this...sideways as it whirled, like a snake moving sideways, a phalanx. Sometimes when they would do that, the front troops would have the shields

and as the enemy would fire, this great long phalanx of shields would extinguish the arrows that would fly. The shield would be wooden usually, covered with thick leather, saturated with oil so that when the fiery arrows went into the oil they were immediately extinguished. It was an oil that put out the flame rather than gave it energy.

As Satan fires his missiles at us, as he fires his temptations at us, we have a shield. And what is that shield? It's the shield of faith. Let me put it to you as simply as I can put it. Every single temptation that Satan sends your way and my way is a temptation to distrust God. It's a temptation to believe a lie and the lie might be...do this and you'll be satisfied...do this and you'll be fulfilled...do this and you'll make more money...do this and you'll gain popularity...do this and you'll feel more comfortable...do this and you'll get what you want. That's the lie. And God says, "Obey Me and I'll bless you," right? Every time you sin who have you believed? Not God. You see, what really shields you is faith. If a trial comes into my life and things aren't going the way I want them to go, and the temptation comes to me to get angry with God and I get angry with God, I have...I have not trusted Him. I should know that God allows these trials to make me strong. I should know that in the midst of these trials He can work His will. I should know that God has a positive purpose in it all. I should know that He is teaching me something and I should say, "God, I thank You for this trial and what You intend for me." And when I do that I say no to the doubts and the anger and the hostility toward God that Satan wants me to exhibit. If I believe God, I thwart the temptation.

If Satan tempts me to do some sin, commit some sin because it will bring me some personal satisfaction and I do it, I have believed Satan's lie and I have not believed God who says if you obey Me you'll know joy and blessing. Sin is just a question of who you believe. And keep this in mind, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. His whole operation is based upon deception and he lies constantly, the whole of all of his worldly system is one big lie.

Somebody asked me not long ago...what is the number one problem in America? If I could narrow it down, what is the number one problem? And I said, the number one problem in America is deceit...is deceit. Lies everywhere. Lies at every point in this society...from the Presidency on down, clear on down into every nook and cranny of our culture there are lies and lies and lies and lies everywhere. That's the main problem.

And we don't know they're lies because we have abandoned the only standard for the truth and that's...what?...the Word of God. So we don't have anything to measure with so we are hopelessly deceived. Satan has developed a system of deception and the only way you can extinguish the arrows of deception that come is to believe God.

Do you really believe God? Faith quenches temptation because when temptation comes you say...I'm not going to do that, too much is at stake, I will dishonor the Lord, I will bring upon myself a retribution and chastening and I will discredit the name of Jesus Christ and I will lose my joy and I'll lose my blessing and my usefulness...all those things that are most important. If you want to stand in the evil day when Satan comes and fires his temptations through the system of the world, you have to have commitment to the battle, righteousness of life, confidence in the presence and power of God who has made His peace with you and is on your side and you have to hold up the shield of believing God. That's what extinguishes the missiles of temptation.

I don't believe Satan. He is a liar. And his system is a ...is basically a reflection, a replication of his deception. And let's add the next one, verse 17, "Take the helmet of salvation."

Now Roman soldiers wore helmets. Why? Well, because you didn't want to become a split personality. You didn't want to have somebody chop your head off. Arrows could strike you in the head. There was a sword called a rhomphaia, it could be as long as four feet in length, double edged, wielded with two hands. You needed a helmet to protect you from a blow from that sword.

What is the helmet of salvation? You mean, salvation? You mean you have to be saved? No, we're already saved. What does he mean by this? Well, to help us Paul refers to it also in his letter to the Thessalonians. First Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 8 calls it the helmet of the hope of salvation. Listen now, "It is the helmet of the hope of salvation for God has not destined us for wrath but obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us." What is this? It's the helmet of the hope of salvation yet to come.

You say, "Well what's the point?" The point is this, one of the great weapons that Satan wants to use to crush the Christian is doubt...doubt. He wants to crush you with blows of insecurity. "You'll never make it, you'll never cut it, you're not a Christian, look at that kind of behavior, look at this kind of behavior, look what you did over there, look what you don't do, look at all the stuff that goes through your mind, look at all the times you fail, you're no Christian." And the continual assault against the assurance of salvation.

Or, it may come like this...you can lose your salvation, one false step and you've lost your salvation, the Lord is going to take that salvation away, you're going to forfeit that salvation. Do you know in evangelical Christianity all over the world there are lots of people that believe that and they live in constant fear that somehow they're going to lose their salvation? It is a debilitating fear, it creates anxiety. Satan wants to steal your joy and steal your usefulness and just grind you to a halt with doubts. And so you have to have the helmet of the hope of salvation. What is that? Confidence in God's eternal salvation.

Now remember what I said to you this morning? Satan is night and day before the throne of God doing...what?...accusing the brethren. I'd like to suggest to you that he's not only in heaven accusing the brethren, but he's on earth doing it as well. Doing his best to make people feel the weight of their sin and to feel unworthy and to feel that God has abandoned them and left them and that they're not worthy to be saved and they're probably not a Christian after all, and so forth and so forth and so forth. And that just sucks the strength right out. It's like sending a soldier into battle who says...Oh, I can't win, I can't fight...oh, woe is me. Yeah, well you might as well ship him back. You don't want to send an athlete out into a great athletic conflict who is milling around saying, "Oh, I don't think I can handle this." He can't. And you don't want to send a Christian into warfare against the enemy who is anything less than confident in the ultimate victory.

I mean, wouldn't it be wonderful, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could go into every athletic event as athletes, knowing the outcome, already seeing the tape and knowing who is going to win? We do as Christians, don't we? I tell people all the time, I read the end of the book and we win. We win. Satan loses. We go into the heavens, the new heavens and the new earth, he goes into the lake of fire and along with him all his demons. We win. We are more than...what?...conquerors through Him who loved us, 2 Corinthians 2, He always, God always causes us to triumph in Christ.

There's an invincibility out there. And we need to have the hope of our eternal salvation, that is to

say the hope of the eternal aspect of it. I know I'm saved. I know I have been saved from sin, I am being saved from the power of sin and some day I'll be saved from the presence of sin when God takes me to heaven and makes me into the image of His own Son. It's in that confidence that I can go into the battle and know the enemy is already defeated. Romans 16:20, I read it to you this morning, that some day God is going to put Satan under our feet. His head was bruised at the cross, he bruised the heel of Christ, Christ bruised his head. He is a defeated foe. Hebrews 2:14 says, The Lord has already taken away from him the power of death by which he holds men bondage all their lifelong and some day he's going to bind him in a chain for a thousand years and then he's going to send him to the lake of fire forever. He is a defeated foe. Don't let Satan smash you with doubts. He is a defeated foe. He will not triumph. And if you have given your heart to Jesus Christ and in simple trust you have turned to Him from your sin and embraced Him as Lord and Savior, don't you let him crush you with doubts that make you useless in the spiritual battle.

Put your confidence in God's promise that whom He predestined He justified, and whom He justified He glorified. Put your confidence in the words of Jesus who said, "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out, but I'll raise him up at the last day." There's nobody going to fall through the cracks.

One final component in this battle. At the end of verse 17, "Take the helmet of salvation and...the verb is implied...and take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." Ah, this is great. Sword here, not rhomphaia, it's not a big four-foot broad sword you're flailing around. It's not a weapon you use indiscriminately. Paul is very selective. The word for sword here is machaira, and machaira referred to a dagger, maybe a dagger eight to twelve inches long...very sharp. But you didn't just stand somewhere and wave it, it wouldn't do any good. It had to be used with tremendous precision. You couldn't just swing it at somebody like you could a rhomphaia, you had to just put it in the right spot. It had to go right into the vulnerable area. It had to be used with very great precision. You had to be skilled to put yourself in a position to thrust it into the deadly blow.

The Word of God is a short dagger. The Word of God is not...is not something you can just flail around. You can't just go beating people in the head with your big Bible. The point is, it's not some imprecise waving around, it is a very precise instrument. It has to be used with great precision and one has to have great agility and alacrity with this dagger to put it exactly where it needs to go at the very moment it needs to go there.

And what is this sword? It is the Word of God. You might, if you know a little Greek, you might have thought that Paul would use the word logos, translated Word here. But he doesn't. Logos is a general term for the word. He chooses a word that is different, rhema and rhema means a specific statement. It's not a generic word for Scripture, it's a word for a specific statement.

Now listen, the sword of the Spirit is not just a Bible, the sword of the Spirit is the specific statement of the Word of God wielded at just the precise moment. Let me tell you, you can own a Bible, you can own a Bible warehouse and not have the sword of the Spirit. It's not possessing a Bible, it's knowing it well enough to use it with precision.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, with what did Jesus answer each temptation? And He didn't just say, "Well, the Bible says you shouldn't do that, Satan." He quoted a specific verse, didn't He? In fact, all three of them out of Deuteronomy. He quoted three specific verses that drove the dagger into the heart of the enemy at the exact moment and at the exact location. It is the ability to use the

Word of God precisely that defends you against the subtleties of Satan's temptation. If you don't know what the Bible teaches about a certain thing, you're vulnerable. I've had people say to me, "You know, if I...if I knew what the Bible said about that, I never would have done it." Well, you better find out what the Bible says about it. One of the reasons we teach you the Word of God constantly is because we want you to have the ability to use it in the battle. We don't want you to be like that spiritual baby tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine cause you can't defend yourself. "There's no temptation taken you but such is as common to man, but God is faithful who will never let you be tempted above that you are able but with the temptation make a way of escape."

And let me tell you, not everybody knows that way of escape from every temptation, you must know the Word. What does the Bible say about this and that and this and that and this? As you begin to learn the Word of God, you become a skilled wielder of the precise dagger that is thrust into the heart of the enemy's system as it comes against you. That's why we teach you the Word of God. What you don't know leaves you tremendously vulnerable. So we want you to be a good soldier. We want you to be skilled and agile in the use of the dagger against the enemy, and that's why we teach you the Word of God so carefully.

You want to be strong against this tremendous spiritual onslaught through the world system? You want to be able to defend yourself when the temptations come? Put on the full armor, you'll be able to stand in the evil day and you'll stand firm because your loins are girded about with truthfulness, commitment, sincerity. You're committed to the battle and to winning it. Your vital areas are protected by righteousness and godliness which you're pursuing. You stand firm against everything that Satan throws at you because you've made your peace with God and He's your great defender. You put up the shield of faith, you believe God and not the lies of Satan. And when he tries to crush you with questions of security and doubts and fears, you have on the helmet of the hope of salvation, you know your salvation is eternally secure. The end of the battle has already been written. The war has been determined. And God is the victor and you with Him. And you wield the sword with tremendous precision.

And then on top of all of that, verse 18, "With all prayer and petition," you pray at all times, consistent with the Holy Spirit." You bathe this entire operation in consistent, constant prayer which reflects your dependence upon the Lord. That's the sum of it all. If you are so equipped, you will be strong in the Lord and in the power or the strength of His might. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You do much for this great truth. How we rejoice that You have called us, that You have saved us and that You have equipped us for victory. Make us strong in Your strength that we might live for Your glory, in Christ's name. Amen.

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