

8. The Armor of God

If God is for us, Who can be against us?

Over the last seven weeks, we have looked at a number of Bible passages that record the fact that there is a cosmic war going on in the unseen heavenly realms right here on Earth, a war that rages on, whether people are aware of it or oblivious to it. If you are a Christian, you cannot escape the fact that you are in a spiritual battle. That which is at stake are the lives of men and women who are greatly loved by God. God does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). As Christians, we have all received our “call-up papers” and are commissioned to play our part by doing all we can to overcome Satan’s schemes and release precious people from his grip and domination.

None of us are exempt from this holy task to make known the Gospel and to promote the Kingdom of God. If we had a cure for cancer and kept it to ourselves, it would be a crime against humanity. There is an enemy that has fostered a spiritual cancer in our world, and to each of us is given the responsibility of bringing the healing of the cancer of sin to the human race. Not all are called to be Bible teachers or pastors, but we all have some part to play. Your part may be in leading small groups. It could be serving in the children’s or youth work. You may be involved in outreach to the under-resourced or to evangelism. There are a million ways we can be involved, but the main point is that each of us does have a unique task and a unique calling as part of the body of Christ. Being part of the forward movement of the kingdom of God by fulfilling our calling to serve is one of the most effective ways to involve ourselves in this spiritual conflict.

¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and **builds itself up** in love, as **each part does its work** (Ephesians 4:16 emphasis mine).

Verse 16 says that God uses servant leaders in the church as ligaments. What do ligaments do? They connect bones and hold organs in place. They are the supporting structure of the Body of Christ, but it is the body that builds itself up in love, each part doing its work. Paul had taught a few verses earlier that God has given various leaders, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, the assignment of preparing God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12). He said the same to the church at Corinth: **“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it”** (1 Corinthians 12:27). Each of us, as part of the body of Christ, will find ourselves under attack. After all, we have taken on the name of Christ as Christians, and through baptism we have openly declared our allegiance to Christ.

Our enemy, the devil, hates the Lord Jesus Christ, and because of our union with Him, Satan hates us as well. It stands to reason that each of us who are Christians are a target of the spiritual forces set against Christ and the forward advance of the Kingdom of God. We don’t all get attacked to the same degree. Those servant leaders that function as ligaments will receive more of the enemy’s time and attention. The enemy seeks to find ways to hinder the work of godly leadership as they equip and teach the body of Christ and help them to grow as Christians:

¹⁸For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—**but Satan stopped us** (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

The passage above speaks of a time when Paul the Apostle, a supporting ligament in the body of Christ, planned to visit the church at Thessalonica, but in some way (we are not told how), Satan stopped him from visiting them and building them up in their faith, so he wrote to them instead. Of course, not all things that hinder our spiritual growth are things that we can blame on the evil one. There are three arenas in this battle that we as Christians war against: The world system set up against God (1 John 2:15), our lower sinful nature (Romans 8:5-11), and our enemy, Satan and his demons. We do suffer the consequences of poor choices when we give in to the dictates of our own sinful nature, but there can also be a lack of faithfulness on our part to obey the Lord. Having said that, there are things that happen to us that are orchestrated by unseen demonic influence, Paul himself said so.

Question 1) In what ways in the past have you felt that Satan has slowed or stopped your personal growth? How has Satan hindered the work of the church in your town, city, or country? (Romans 1:13; 15:22).

Because all of us who are Christians are part of the body of Christ, none of us are exempt from this conflict and attack by demonic forces. The Scripture says that all who seek to live a godly life in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). In other words, there is opposition from evil forces toward each of us, some more, some less, depending on our level of influence and accountability in the body of Christ. To counter these attacks, Paul the Apostle writes a letter to the Ephesian church about the five forms of defense and the two ways for us to be on the offensive. We will look at the Offensive Weapons of the Believer in our next study. Let's look at what Paul says about our spiritual armor.

The Armor of God

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:10-18).

At the time he was writing these words, Paul was being kept under house arrest in Rome. Most scholars believe that he was chained to a Roman soldier while he was writing this letter to the church at Ephesus. He used the Roman soldier's shield, armor and sword as a metaphor for what he wanted to teach the Ephesians and all who would read his words about overcoming the attacks of Satan. When we have divine armor to protect us, in the same way that the Roman soldier's

armor protected him, we will be strong, not in ourselves, but in the Lord and in His mighty power, which is more than a match for any demonic spirit.

The Defensive Armor of the Believer

As a young believer many years ago, I worked to support my church planting ministry by working as a painter and decorator. Sometimes, we did sub-contract work together with other painters on huge buildings in the east end of London. I remember working together with some other painters who were also believers. Because of a time crunch on the job, we had to sleep on the job in our clothes and continue in the morning. In the early morning as I watched my two friends who were fellow believers, they went through a kind of ritual where they acted through putting on unseen armor while in prayer. If you go through that kind of ritual in the morning, I don't want to dissuade you, but I see this armor that Paul talks about as character dispositions. They are not taken off and put on again the next morning. It's not like in a video game where you buy a weapon or armor when you get to a certain stage in the game. This armor about which we are talking are provisions from the Master who has called us to fight.

Let's put it another way. If your nation were to call you up to fight a war, one of the first things you would do would be to go to the quartermaster stores and get your uniform. You don't buy it; you don't earn it. It is given to you by the One for whom you are fighting. You don't tell the quartermaster what kind of armor you would like. He has already thought that through for you and constructed it to His specifications in order to equip you to face and defeat the enemy you are fighting. Battles are often won or lost on the strength of one's armor or weaponry. It's called the Armor of God for a reason. It is not to be the armor of self. I don't want to trust a helmet of my own making, for it might let me down when there is a crucial blow to the head. I don't want a shield of my will power; I need an impartation of the kind of faith that God gives. To fight a spiritual enemy, we must have spiritual armor. With those thoughts in mind, let us look now at what our heavenly General would have us put on:

(1) The Belt of Truth

The Roman soldier's belt kept everything in place. Ancient combat was largely hand to hand fighting, so loose fitting clothing was a liability. Before fighting, the Roman soldier would tuck in his clothes and tighten his belt. In Paul's mind truth held everything in place in the Christian warrior's life.

Question 2) What does Paul mean by the truth, and why is it so important to a Christian?

Paul knew that truth is an integral part of spiritual warfare. Without the truth stabilizing us, we come apart when we try and fight against the enemy. There are three ways that we buckle ourselves with the truth. The first is that of knowing the person of Christ who is the Truth. Jesus said, "I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus is the embodiment of the truth. When we come into relationship with Him, we come to truth personified. We are set free in our spirit when we know the person of truth (John 8:32). The second thing that Paul could have had on his mind was that we are to buckle ourselves with a worldview that comes from Scripture. Paul the Apostle, when he was saying goodbye to

the elders of Ephesus, said, ²⁶"Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:26-27). When we get to grips with knowing the whole truth about who Jesus is and what He has done, Satan has less lies and fiery darts to throw at us. The mature Christian is able to shrug off the deceptive lying tactics of demons.

The third thing that Paul may have been referring to in mentioning truth as a belt is that of the absence of lies and deceit in the heart of the Christian. We are to be truthful in the things that we say and in the lives that we live. We are to live a life of integrity. We are to agree with the truth not only by accepting the Word of God but also by living according to it, i.e. choosing to walk in the light of God. We fall under the condemnation of demons when we are knowingly deceitful. In setting out deliberately to be deceptive, we are opening the door to deceit for the "father of lies."

Do not be surprised if this provokes more temptation and trials. The enemy loves to catch us in a lie before unbelievers. When we deal in deceit, we are stepping into the enemy's territory, and in so doing, we make ourselves vulnerable to attack. Our lack of integrity is a tool in the hand of demons to accuse us and cause us to wilt before our enemy's condemnation. If you find yourself in such a situation, agree with God's word quickly. The enemy will have no hold over you, no condemnation for those who accept God's provision for forgiveness!

(2) The Breastplate of Righteousness

When Paul looked at it, a Roman soldier's breastplate reminded him of how a Christian needs righteousness as a defense of the heart and inner organs. There are two possibilities that could have been in Paul's mind as he wrote. The first is the need for imputed righteousness. What do we mean by imputed? Imputed means *credited to our account* as in the case when God spoke to Abraham, our father in the faith, and told him that he would be father to a multitude of people even though he was old and childless.

⁵He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶Abram believed the Lord, and **he credited it to him as righteousness** (Genesis 15:5-6).

Abraham believed God. What was God's response to Abraham's faith? We are told righteousness was credited to his spiritual bank account (Genesis 15:5-6). Imputed righteousness puts us in right standing before God, allowing Him to come and live within us by His Spirit. Our right standing with God is not due to our own efforts; it is given as a gift when we believe (Romans 4:1-8). That's why we love Him so! God has been so generous and kind toward us in dealing with us in this way. God treats each of us as Christians in the same way He treated Abraham. He imputes the righteousness of Christ to us as a gift when we believe in the substitutionary work of Jesus on the cross and trust in Him for salvation. He died for you, and He died *as* you. By this, I mean that He hung on the cross for your sins, *bearing your sins* in His body (1 Peter 2:24). When we believe God's testimony about the finished work of His Son on the cross, He credits righteousness, i.e. the righteousness of Christ, to our spiritual bank account:

²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When the enemy comes to you with accusations of what you have said and done wrong, we can reply that Jesus cried out from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The Greek word translated “finished” is an accounting term, which means *paid in full*. He has paid my debt of sin. There is nothing that can be done to add to the righteousness that Christ imparts to us upon believing. It is not ninety-five percent of Jesus’ work and five percent our work. It is all of Jesus! The debt has been fully paid by Christ. The believer who knows what Christ has done for him can laugh at the enemy’s vain attempt at saying that the believer is not good enough. Christ is our righteousness.

Paul could also be pointing out that the breastplate of righteousness speaks of walking a life of right living before God. If this is the interpretation to which Paul was referring, he may have been concerned that the enemy’s darts could find a lodging place in the heart of a believer if he or she is not living a life of confession and repentance. We are to walk in the light as He is in the light:

⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

This calls for a life of vulnerability before God and others. The enemy’s darts of accusation and condemnation cannot lodge in the heart if one is living a life of obedience and right living before God and his or her brothers and sisters in Christ. However, when we sin, we need to be open and vulnerable to God about it and talk to Him about our sin. Ask Him for forgiveness, and if something was done to someone else, to get it right with that person. Sometimes, restitution is needed. If so, don’t delay in paying it.

I remember one occasion when I was a young believer and still working as a commercial fisherman, I was working my father’s boat alone one night, which was a dangerous thing to do. There was one particular area called the Stone Banks where lots of fish would feed on the rich levels of worm that was found there. I towed my nets several times over the Stone Banks before heading home as it began to be daylight. As the daylight came I noticed that someone else’s trammel nets were caught on the Otter Boards of my trawl net. Someone else had laid this long wall of netting across the Stone Banks before it got dark, not knowing that I was going to fish there during the night. The Holy Spirit prompted me to find out who had laid nets there and to go and pay him the cost of new nets. When this thought first came to me, my immediate defensive response to God was to inform the Lord that the other fisherman did not set lights on his buoys, so I was not liable. I had no need to pay him. However, the Holy Spirit would not let me go, and I could not get peace about it.

Several hours later, I gave up resisting the Spirit’s promptings and went to see Les Smith, the owner of the nets. I confessed to him that I had accidentally destroyed his nets and gave him the money for brand new nets. I still remember the look on his face that someone would do such a thing. He knew that his loss was his own fault. It was a testimony that rang around the community of fishermen, something “different” had happened to Keith Thomas. You can never

imagine the joy I felt inside at being obedient to the Spirit and making restitution for something I did that had brought difficulty to someone else's life. It is right living that honors God.

In some situations, the Spirit of God may require you to be accountable to a close friend in your small group who can hold you to account for a particular sin that gets the best of you. Being open to others in this way takes the deception and hypocrisy out of the picture and is a breastplate of righteousness to the enemy's attacks. Here is what James wrote concerning being vulnerable to other Christians:

¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

Question 3) Who are we to confess our sins to? What happens when a person forgets to get things right not only with God but also with others?

As our Father, God will at times discipline His people. By His discipline, we see that we are His children (Hebrews 12:7-8). It sure will be easier on us if we have a short account with God and we think on the day's affairs before going to bed at night. Be sensitive to keep your heart clean before God by daily confession and repentance of sin. God's power to say no to sin and temptation has been given to us when we believed and received the Spirit. We are empowered to live a righteous life because we have right standing with God.

(3) Feet Fitted with the Gospel of Peace

Paul next looks at the Roman soldier's feet. He sees the *caliga* or half-boots with nails in them to grip the ground in combat. Without the studs in the bottom of the soles, the Roman soldier would be slipping on the ground when in combat. We cannot stand our ground before our spiritual enemies if we don't have peace with God, and the peace of God.

Jesus came as a mediator between God and man. Paul wrote that there was only one mediator between God and man, that person being Jesus the Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). We cannot stand our ground before the enemy without having the peace of God reigning in our hearts. When a man is born-again of the Spirit of God (John 3:3), there comes a deep settled peace with God, where the person knows in the depths of his heart that his soul is at rest before God. Paul the apostle said,

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

Not only does a Christian have peace with God, but also he is also given the peace of God: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (John 14:27). When a Christian is faced with life-threatening danger, he has a deep settled peace that passes all understanding.

Eric Barker was a missionary from Great Britain who had spent over fifty years in Portugal preaching the gospel, often under adverse conditions. During World War Two, the situation became so critical that he took the advice to send his wife and eight children to England for safety. His sister and her three children were also evacuated on the same

ship. Barker remained behind to conclude some mission matters. The Sunday after Barker's loved ones had left, he stood before the congregation and said, "I've just received word that all my family have arrived safely home." He then proceeded with the service as usual. Later, the full meaning of his words became known to the people. He had been handed a telegram just before the meeting, informing him that a submarine had torpedoed the ship, and everyone on board had drowned. Barker knew that all on board were believers, and the knowledge that his family was enjoying the bliss of heaven enabled him to live above his circumstances in spite of his overwhelming grief.¹

Question 4) Do you have a particular strategy to overcome or counter anxious or worrisome thoughts? Do you have a story of peace in the middle of trying circumstances?

Another person who sees the same circumstances and does not have Christ ruling and reigning in his heart finds it difficult not to worry and be anxious. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). People often come to Christ when they see the peace that a Christian has when in tough circumstances. Everyone longs for this kind of peace. It is very evident when you have this peace in your life, especially when you face troubled times.

(4) The Shield of Faith

The Roman shield that Paul was viewing in the room with him, was the *scutum*, a large door sized shield that the Roman soldier could fit his whole body behind when arrows, darts, and javelins were coming toward him. The size of the shield was around four feet high and two and a half feet wide. It was made of two layers of laminated wood and overlaid with hide, linen and iron. When a fiery dart or arrow pierced the shield, it was snuffed out as it buried itself into the shield. Paul pictures the Christian's faith as a spiritual shield. When the enemy fires a dart of accusation, temptation, guilt or any other of those sins in his quiver, the Christian replies with faith in God. What is faith? It is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

We cannot see the heavenly resources that are at our disposal, but we are certain, by faith, that God is with us and He has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). When we know the truth of that promise, we can endure all things that the enemy throws at us. Our faith protects us from the lies and discouragements that can so easily wound us. It changes our perspective and colors everything we view, filtering it all through the shield of faith, removing the poisonous darts before they can settle in our hearts and infect us.

Another thing that may have been in Paul's mind was the way in which the Roman soldiers used their shields. They moved as a unit of one and interlocked their shields to cover all sides so that they were all protected from arrows as they moved forward. In the same way, we ought to watch out for each other. When we fight the fight of faith, we all benefit each other. Watch out for your brother and sister in Christ by speaking the truth in love and by caring for one another. We are to, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). As we

¹ 1500 illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Edited by Michael Green. Baker Book House, page 260.

support one another in this way, we bolster each other's effectiveness in this spiritual battle that we fight together. We are not just an "army of one;" we are an army made up of many members, with one Captain of our salvation.

(5) The Helmet of Salvation

The fifth piece of armor that Paul mentions is the Roman helmet. He typifies it as a helmet of salvation. Perhaps the thought in Paul's mind was that the enemy targets the mind in spiritual warfare. His attack, especially to a young immature believer, usually seeks to dismiss the very existence of God. Doubts fly through the air in the same way as a sword attacks the head. It is then that you do not want a bag on your head instead of a helmet provided by the heavenly quartermaster. The assurance of salvation is there as a protection over the mind. The inner witness of the Spirit that we are God's children protects a person's mind as a helmet protects the head: **"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children"** (Romans 8:16). We can face every demonic attack knowing that nothing can separate us from God's love. Whatever trial or hardship, persecution, famine, danger or sword that life throws at us, we know that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. Paul says:

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

When we know, deep down, that nothing can separate us from God's love, not even demonic powers, angels, or demons, our minds are firmly secure in the Lord. Our minds are the biggest battleground, and that is why it is so important for us to win the battle in our minds. To cover and protect our minds with the helmet of salvation, we immerse our minds in the truth of God's Word that our salvation is full and complete and does not rely on us. It is a finished work that God has accomplished for us.

Question 5) Which part of your spiritual defensive armor do you most need to strengthen right now? (You may want to break up into groups of two or three and pray for one another after being transparent about your spiritual needs).

Prayer: Father, come afresh to Your children who today read these words. Protect them from the evil one. Grant them a fresh filling today as You did this for those who prayed passionately in the upper room some 2,000 years ago, i.e. they were filled afresh by your Spirit. Help Your children to find their place of service in the Body of Christ. Amen.

Keith Thomas,

Email: keiththomas7@gmail.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com