

DRESSED FOR VICTORY

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Over the past few of weeks we've been examining our 'offensive' weapons and the strategy we can apply to enforce the devil's defeat. Today we will be looking at the 'defensive' weapons we have at our disposal. But remember, whatever stand you choose to take against the forces of darkness, you have the victory already secured. And during the struggle, you can use the "force of resistance" to cause the enemy to flee! James 4:7 declares, ***“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*** To resist means to withstand or oppose in some manner. Resistance can also be an action we take by using the only offensive weapon in the "full armour of God," the ***sword of the Spirit***, which is the Word of God. Therefore, using the Scriptures to expose satan's lies and temptations is the most effective way to nullify them.

Like it or not, there is a 'spiritual battle' that every one of us is involved in. And the battleground for this intense spiritual struggle is not some earthy territory; it is the human heart. Both Jesus and the devil are supremely interested in winning possession of our minds and our hearts. For this reason, Christians are called to be more than peaceful spectators or mediators in this violent conflict. We must be committed "front-line" commandos; ready to do what our Commander in Chief tells us. And because these battles are of a spiritual nature, the weapons we employ are also spiritual. This is why Paul reminds us that, "***We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places***" (Ephesians 6:12). Paul also makes it clear that our commitment to this cause should be as real as it is for any natural soldier. "***You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier***" (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Note, although our weapons and armour are spiritual, this does not mean they are unreal or ineffective. "***For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but 'mighty through God' to the pulling down of strong holds***" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Our weapons and armour are "mighty through God," therefore, they are not our weapons and armour but Gods! If you were to do a study on the armour of God, looking up all the Bible references on armour; searching for passages that would support the importance of wearing armour when charging off into battle; you may become disappointed. After all, Saul's armour did not fit David and Goliath's armour was useless against David's stone. Also, a stray arrow found a crack in Ahab's armour, killing the wicked king. "***So what's the point of wearing armour,***" you may be thinking!

However, we are not called to wear the faulty body armour of Saul, Ahab, or Goliath. Rather, we are told to put on the unfailing armour of God! In fact, at the very moment that Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he might well have been chained to a soldier sporting the armour of the Roman Empire. Paul could see firsthand how frail and ineffective the defences of man could be against the prince of darkness. This is probably why he twice emphasised “the armour of God.” Always remember, it’s not your armour you are asked to put on but God’s! Now that we have established that we are to wear the armour of God and not of man, we must be careful not to miss the admonition to wear all the items God has provided. Verse 11 cautions, **“Put on the whole armour of God,”** and verse 13 declares, **“Take unto you the whole armour of God.”** This is where many Christians fail. They take some of God’s armour, but forget one or two parts, and pay a serious price for their neglect.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul attaches a spiritual association to six items of a Roman soldier’s armour. Let’s now consider each of these, one by one, to see what we can learn:

Belt of Truth

When the apostle Paul describes the armour of God, he is talking about more than a simple set of helpful items. He is talking about the impregnable defences of the Almighty God. These are keys to withstanding the attacks and onslaughts of the devil. They are ultimate and infinitely powerful tools available to us as Christians. Yet, Paul chooses to begin describing that set of armour by talking about a belt. Why, of all things, a belt? He could have started with the mighty Sword of the Spirit, the towering Shield of Faith, the shining Breastplate of Righteousness; anything but a simple belt? But Paul didn’t! So that begs the question - why?

The belt played a crucial role in the effectiveness of a soldier's armour. It was the belt that held the sheath, without which there would be no place to put a sword. Imagine an overzealous soldier, fired up and charging out into battle; but without his belt, and consequently without a weapon! In addition, from the belt "hung strips of leather to protect the lower body (around the groin)." This area was an easy target for the enemy when in close combat. The Matthew Henry Commentary says the belt "*girds on, or secures, all the other pieces of our armour.*" **Truth** should be attached to us as a belt is attached to a soldier's body. The spiritual significance is that God does not simply want us to point at the truth; He wants us to wear it and have it wrapped around us all the time. Remember, not only does the belt hold everything in place, it also serves to carry the sheath that holds the Sword of the Spirit for ready access. Some people have the sword of God's Word, but without the belt of Truth they come to reckless conclusions and give the devil room to deceive them. As a result, their lives are full of confusion and defeat.

Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate was an important item of defence that protected the front torso and all of the vital organs. It was often composed of a solid piece of metal, but it could also contain numerous small pieces that were sewn to cloth or leather that overlapped much like the scales of a fish. These scales could number as many as 700 to 1,000 per "coat." When the sun shone directly on the armour, it could become very hot. So to avoid being burnt, or even pinched, by the moving metal plates, the soldiers always wore a sturdy **robe** under the armour. In other words, the "breastplate of righteousness" should always be worn together with the Robe of Jesus' righteousness. "***I put on righteousness, and it clothed me***" (Job 29:14). The Robe of Jesus is next to the skin and covers most of the body. Also keep in mind that the high priest wore a golden breastplate over his linen robe.

This represented nearness to the heart, ***“And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart”*** (Exodus 28:29). The only way we can experience victory in battle against the forces of darkness is through confidence that the righteousness of Jesus covers our hearts and that we are forgiven. Another interesting aspect of the breastplate was that it offered no protection to the person’s back. It was assumed that soldiers would never turn their backs toward the enemy and retreat. Likewise, as soldiers we should stand firm and never surrender any ground to the devil. God’s got your back covered, as long as you keep standing and keep resisting the enemy.

Shield of Faith

The warrior’s shield was his first line of defence. Usually made of wood or bronze, it was often big enough to protect the whole body when the soldier crouched down under a hail of arrows. Likewise, faith in Christ’s blood is our first defence against the great accuser. The enemy is constantly firing volley after volley of those flaming arrows of carnal desires and lies. The purpose for this shield of faith was to deflect the fiery darts of the enemy and prevent them from ever making contact. Multitudes of Christians fall on the battlefield and fail to overcome evil because they wait until they are immersed in the fires of accusation, temptation and lies before making any effort to resist. At that point, it is often too late. Once you recognise a fiery dart sailing toward you, there is no time to lose. Hold up that shield of faith and do everything in your power to keep as much distance as possible between you and anything the devil is firing your way. If we yield without a fight, we are in reality inviting defeat (rather than enforcing it). Another thing to note is that the shield was not held loosely in the soldier’s hand, it was firmly strapped to his forearm so he could resist the mighty blows of an enemy’s sword without fear of dropping it. Likewise, you cannot have flimsy (timid) faith while the battle is raging!

The shields of old were also often of a distinctive nature, sometimes marked with the insignia or name of the emperor to help soldiers avoid fighting their own comrades in the confusion of battle. In the same way, when the devil sends his flaming arrows, we are to hold up the shield bearing the name of our King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Do you know that many soldiers would soak their shields in water before going to battle. They did this so that any flaming arrows that hit their shield were quickly extinguished. Likewise, we have “water” by the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26) to soak our shields in and extinguish the fiery darts!

Helmet of Salvation

There are several Bible stories that stress the importance of protecting the head while in battle. The giant Goliath became outraged that young David would dare come against him with nothing more than a shepherd’s staff and sling in his hand. Goliath’s haughtiness apparently prompted him to carelessly push back his helmet, because minutes later a smooth stone from David’s sling had sunk deep into the giant’s forehead. There are some Christians who have received “rocks to the head” from neglecting to wear their helmets. But the purpose for this helmet of salvation is not only to keep out the rocks, but also to keep in the brains! Your mind should not be open to anything and everything. You should be filtering every thought through God’s infallible word!

Your body has seven sacred openings from the neck up: two nostrils, two ears, two eyes, and one mouth. Our biggest problems usually come from what enters and exits the mouth. This might be why the Lord gave us only one mouth. In eternity will we probably appreciate how pivotal to our salvation our choices were - concerning what we allowed to enter our minds through these vital senses. We must firmly strap the helmet of salvation in place and guard these avenues to the soul.

Gospel Sandals

Imagine yourself standing barefooted on a rocky terrain, like in the Middle East. You could move, but without shoes you would be useless in battle. The weight of the other pieces of armour would only make your feet more sensitive, if you wore no protection. You would be a "push-over" for the enemy, as you would have no agility and be wincing in pain every time you attempted to move. This is why it is essential to have our "feet shod with the gospel of peace." In practice, the Gospel means we are dead to our self-life with all of its lusts and instincts, and alive through a new life in Christ. The good news is that by considering ourselves "dead men" in Christ, we can be put at peace with God. If we have truly died to self, then over time our instincts will be "dead" to the rocks and broken glass and thorns of this world. Those standing on the Gospel of Jesus will not react in the flesh. Instead, we will move by God's Spirit with a protected disregard for "self," being made ready by the shoes of the "death, burial, and resurrection of Christ", which is the Gospel that brings peace.

In the Bible, the foot is usually a symbol for the direction or "the walk" of a person's life. Having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace gives us a good footing on good ground. As we become involved in spreading the Good News, it will strengthen us (and others) against the enemy's attacks. ***"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good news, who proclaim peace; who brings good tidings, who proclaim salvation"*** (Isaiah 52:7). Let me say this, "You don't want to be caught without your gospel shoes on while journeying through this wilderness! And don't remove your gospel shoes for any reason! You never need to worry about them wearing away; God will resole them every time you return to the Cross. If you are faithful, He will say to you, as He did to the children of Israel: ***"Your sandals have not worn out on your feet"*** (Deuteronomy 29:5).

Sword of the Spirit

The sword was the most common weapon in battle. Indeed, the word “sword” appears 449 times in Scripture. The other armaments in God’s arsenal are defensive in nature, but the sword is primarily an offensive weapon. In fact, the sword of God’s Word is what Jesus used against the devil. When Jesus said, **“I did not come to bring peace but a sword,”** He was not saying that He, the Prince of peace, had come to start wars (Matthew 10:34). Rather, He was pointing out that the sword of God’s Word has a dividing effect. Several times, this sword is depicted as having two edges: **“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12).

The edges of the Spirit’s sword is to be used, (1) against the enemy and (2) for personal use. Yes, we must be ready to apply the sword to ourselves. So remember, the Word of God is a practical tool for every area of life (as well as fighting the devil). A soldier traveling in enemy territory never left his sword out of reach. It is always kept close by! In ancient times, there was no stainless steel so a sword became rusty and dull. Swords were kept clean by frequent use or by honing them against a stone (the Rock of Ages) or another soldier’s sword. **“Iron sharpens iron”** (Proverbs 27:11. Our skill in the Word is sharpened the very same way. **“The word of God never returns void,”** therefore, it can never fail against the enemy. Why? Because God is watching over His Word to perform it (Ezekiel 12:25)! What’s more, God has paid the bill for our entire arsenal. All that we need was purchased at Calvary by the blood of His own dear Son. Just as Jonathan so loved David that he gave him his armour, sword, robe and indeed his very throne (1 Samuel 18:3-4), so Jesus gives us all we need in this spiritual battle. **We are dressed for victory!**