

The Armor of God

Spiritual Warfare, Session 6

Warm-up Question: If you were called up to serve in the armed forces, what would you request to be involved in?

Over the last five 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 whether people are aware of it, or oblivious to it. In this session, we will examine how we are to defend ourselves against our enemies, the spiritual forces of evil, and also how we are to go on the offensive to win those who are currently blinded to the consequences of living in darkness. That which is at stake is 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 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 do 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 your calling is one of the most effective ways we involve ourselves in this spiritual conflict.

¹⁶ From 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).

God uses 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 being to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12). He says 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). As part of the body of Christ, we do find ourselves under attack. After all, we have taken on the name of Christ as Christians, and through baptism have openly declared our allegiance to the one who our enemy, the devil, hates the Lord Jesus Christ. It stands to reason that we would be a target of the spiritual forces that are opposed to Christ and to the kingdom of God. We don’t all get attacked to the same degree. Those in positions of leadership as ligaments will receive more of the enemy’s time and attention. He seeks to find ways to hinder the work of godly leadership to educate church members in their growth as members of the body.

¹⁸ For 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 where 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. Whatever work he was planning to do, he was not able to complete to build them up in their faith. Of course, not all things that hinder our spiritual growth are things that we can blame on the devil. We also suffer the consequences of poor choices on our part, or lack of faithfulness on our part, but there are things that happen to us that are orchestrated by demonic influence.

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 your church? (Romans 1:13; 15:22).

Because all of us that are Christians are a part of the body of Christ, none of us are exempt from this conflict and attack by demonic forces. The scripture says that all those that 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, others less, depending on your level of influence and accountability in the body of Christ. To counter these attacks, Paul the apostle writes about five forms of defense and two ways for us to be on the offensive.

The Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For 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. ¹³ Therefore 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And 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 together with a Roman soldier while he was writing this letter to the church at Ephesus. He used the Roman soldier's 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, more than a match for any demonic spirit. Let's take a look at each one:

Defensive Armor

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.

Why is truth 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 two ways that we agree with, and embrace the truth. The first is that of knowing the truth of God, as a person. 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 truth (John 8:32). When we get to grips with knowing the truth about just who Jesus is, 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 second thing that Paul maybe 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 the life we live. We are to agree with the truth not just by accepting the Word of God but by living according to it, choosing to walk in the light of God. We fall under the condemnation of demons when we are knowingly deceitful. 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, make ourselves vulnerable to attack. Our lack of integrity is a tool in the hand of demons in deterring an unbeliever from faith in Christ.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

A Roman soldier's breastplate, when Paul looked at it, reminded him of how a Christian needs righteousness as a defense of the heart and inner organs. Again, there are two possibilities that maybe in Paul's mind. The first is the need for imputed righteousness. What do we mean by imputed? Imputed means

credited to our account. 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. 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. 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 His righteousness to us as a gift when we believe in the substitutionary work of the Son 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. When we believe God's testimony about the finished work of His Son on the cross, He credits righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, to our spiritual bank account:

²¹ God 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 your work. It is all of Jesus! The debt has been fully paid by Christ.

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 of what Paul was referring to, he was concerned that the enemy has access to the heart of a believer if he or she is not living a life of confession and repentance and walking in the light as He is in the light:

⁷ But 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. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will for-

give us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

Who are we to confess our sins to?

This calls for a life of vulnerability before God and others. The enemy's darts of accusation and condemnation cannot reach the heart if one is living a life of obedience and right living before God and his or her brothers and sisters in Christ. But when we sin, we need to be open and vulnerable to God about it and talk to Him about our sin. Ask Him to forgive you, 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. 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:

¹⁶ Therefore 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).

What happens when a person forgets to get things right not only with God, but with others?

As our Father, God will at times discipline His sons. 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 the Spirit of God took residence in our lives. 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-boot 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.

What do you do when you have anxious thoughts?

How can a person have the peace of God and peace with 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, 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. 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. ⁷And 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 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, and in His mighty power to ward off every evil attack. 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 sting us. Another thing that may have been in Paul’s mind was the way that 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 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. As we do this, 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.

How does a person grow in his faith?

5. 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. 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: ¹⁶The 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:

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, **neither angels nor demons**, neither the present nor the future, **nor any powers**, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor any-

thing 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 your mind with the Helmet of salvation, immerse your mind in the truth of God's Word.

Which part of your spiritual defensive armor do you most need to strengthen right now?

Offensive Armor

1. The Sword of the Spirit

Paul goes on to mention a sixth implement of warfare that the Roman soldier used in battle, his sword. The kind of sword Paul mentions is the machaira, the short double edged sword, usually only 18 inches long. It was most effective in hand-to-hand combat. Paul uses this sword as a metaphor for the Word of God. This sword was used to parry every sword thrust by an enemy but also used as an offensive weapon in the hand of the Roman soldier. We have our Lord Jesus Christ as a model in using this weapon as a defensive and offensive tool against the enemy. When He was led by the Spirit to battle with Satan in the wilderness, Jesus used the sword of the Word of God to parry each attack of the enemy. When Satan came saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread (Matthew 4:3). Jesus replied quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written: Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Just as the physical body needs bread, the staple diet of the Israelite, so the believer in Christ needs to be sustained by daily meditation on the Word of God to overcome the evil one. Do not underestimate the power of the Word of God that is at work in and through the believer in Christ:

¹² For the word of God is living and active. **Sharper than any double-edged sword**, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12 Emphasis mine).

When we wield the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the authority of God is behind God's Word and it inflicts terrible damage on Satan and his demons. We are ambassadors of Christ and the authority of the government of God is behind us.

2. Prayer in the Spirit

We could be tempted to think that Paul only mentions one offensive weapon, but I believe that his second one cannot be typified by any part of a Roman's armor, so he mentions prayer making no analogy at all. Here is what Paul's second offensive spiritual weapon is:

¹⁸ And 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 6:18).

What do you think is in Paul's mind when he instructs us to pray in the Spirit with all kinds of prayers and requests?

There are some among the Church worldwide who would say that Paul is talking about praying in an unknown tongue. They would remind us of two verses from Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers:

² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.

¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14).

My personal belief is that Paul, in talking about offensive prayer (Ephesians 6:18) is talking about all kinds of Spirit-led and empowered prayer that breaks down every demonic stronghold not only in people, but in territory that is dominated by demonic spirits. Some of this may be people that are led to pray in unknown tongues but others can pray in their native language, as they are led by the Spirit. Paul is very clear in chapter twelve of his first letter to the Corinthian church that not all Christians speak in tongues (Verse 30). The Corinthians were a very gifted group of people but I can't see him seeking to limit the believers in Ephesus by meaning that praying in the Spirit was to pray in tongues. The Body of Christ is a multi-faceted or-

ganism that uses the gifts and talents they have been given to pull down spiritual strongholds through many different kinds of prayer. Spirit-led prayer is always backed up by the authority of God and the anointing presence of the Spirit. We have an example of this type of prayer in Acts 4:23-31. The early disciples saw that they were under attack but their fight was not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces. How did they respond to this demonic persecution? They prayed impassionedly to God. In this instance, the very place where the believers were joined together was shaken after they raised their voices to God in Spirit empowered and led prayer. The result of this kind of Spirit led prayer was that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the message of God with boldness.

I would like to close with a story of people that joined together in Spirit-led prayer to overcome demonic strongholds over a city in Argentina:

In the book by C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, pages 30-34, there is the story of a strategy to reach the city of Resistencia in the northern province of Chaco, Argentina. Ed Silvoso, an Argentinean evangelist, initiated a three-year plan to change the spiritual atmosphere over the city so that people could hear and respond to the Gospel. As of the beginning of 1990, fewer than 6000 of its 400,000 population were evangelical believers, a mere 1.5 percent. He moved members of his Harvest Evangelism team into Resistencia and for over a year laid a foundation of prayer, spiritual warfare and leadership training. They had Cindy Jacobs, a lady gifted with Intercessory prayer, lead two seminars on warfare prayer, the people responded well and wanted to take authority over their city the next morning. Silvoso writes, "A group of 80 showed up and marched into the Plaza de Mayo of Buenos Aires, praying for five hours of intense battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places. Among other things, the group sensed a spirit of witchcraft and a spirit of death in the Ministry of Social Welfare building where President Peron's notorious warlock, Jose Lopez Riga, had maintained his office. When the group left the plaza, they felt a sense of victory. The principalities and powers had not been destroyed, but warfare prayer had in some measure begun to weaken the evil hold on Argentina. Over the city of Resistencia, the people all knew the names of the spirits that were ruling over the

city. San La Muerte, the spirit of death, was perhaps the most powerful. A large number of citizens of Resistencia were so devoted to San La Muerte that they had tiny bone images of his idol surgically implanted under their skin or under their nipples, believing the false promise that this will assure them of a "good death." Other spirits of equal rank turned out to be Pombero, a spirit of division who brought terror, especially to children during the siesta time and at night; Curapi, a spirit of sexual perversion, the Queen of Heaven, a religious spirit, who had perverted the true character of the traditional church; and the spirit of Freemasonry, a cleverly disguised form of occult power. Surprisingly, the images of these spirits and their activities were clearly depicted on several large folk art murals in the central plaza of the city."

What was the outcome? Ed Silvoso reports that the growth graphs of the churches in Resistencia took a decided turn upward beginning in April when the group prayed in the plaza. In one public event, 250 people were baptized in portable pools. Crowds of almost 17,000 packed into an open field for evangelistic meetings where objects used in occult rituals and witchcraft were burned in a 55 gallon drum each night. Hundreds were healed physically and delivered from demons. At least 18 new churches were started. Most significant of all, the evangelical population of Resistencia virtually doubled in the calendar year of 1990. Perhaps a weakening sign of the territorial spirits over Resistencia was the tragic fate of the high priestess of the cult of San La Muerte, the spirit of death. Two weeks before the massive evangelistic thrust and after the time of prayer in the center of the city, her bed caught fire. For some reason the flames seemed to be selective. They consumed only the mattress, the woman, and her statue of San La Muerte! ¹

Now I certainly do not advocate any single person taking on spirits in this way. These believers were over 80 people in one accord and Spirit-led in what they were doing. I am using the story to illustrate the fact that these things are real and that Jesus has won the victory over them at the cross. When the Body of Christ works together under Godly inspired leadership, whole towns and cities can be won to Christ. Are you part of a solid expression of Jesus Christ in your town or city? If not, begin to seek the Lord to show you where you

¹ Warfare Prayer, C. Peter Wagner, Regal Books, Pages 30-34.

are to serve. It is important that you have other believers around you and a supporting ligament that holds you into place as an organ of Christ. Being accountable somewhere is a strong defense to you as a believer. If you are not yet a believer, perhaps today is your day. The Bible says that today is the day of the salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Why not reach out to Him with all

your heart today?

Prayer: Father, come afresh to each person that reads these words today. Protect them from the evil one. Grant them a fresh filling today as those that prayed impassionedly were filled afresh by your Spirit. Help each one to find their place of service in the Body. Amen.

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