

HOW THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMOR PROTECTS

Br. Ted Smith

In Eph. 6:10, 11 we read, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Adversary.” It is impossible to appreciate the value of the armor of God unless we understand what is to be protected by that armor. Paul writes (2 Cor. 5:17), “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” The Christian is a new creature in the sense that he, as an individual, has a new mental outlook on life. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit of Truth. To illustrate: one who, through certain influences and willingness of mind, has decided to become a doctor, takes a doctor’s viewpoint—he studies to be a doctor, and his mind is alert to everything that will assist him in the practice of medicine; and his sympathies are for the suffering. So with the Christian—through certain influences, and a willingness of mind, he has the viewpoint of Christ, who said, “Not My will, but Thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42) As Christ looked upon life from the standpoint of God’s plan as revealed in His Holy Word, even so does the Christian. Therefore, the armor of God is for the protection of this mental state, the new mind, the viewpoint of Christ, which the Christian has adopted as his own. Let us examine each piece of armor, and as we do so, we shall find that the use for each piece is simple to understand, yet mighty as a protecting power.

The first piece of armor is the girdle of Truth (V. 14). In olden times, a girdle was used to bind up the garments while work was being performed. Therefore a girdle is a fitting symbol of work or servitude. The girdle of Truth, then, signified that the Christian is a servant of the Truth. We find this clearly taught in the Bible—that a Christian is an “ambassador for Christ” holding forth the Word of Reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Phil. 2:16) But, one may ask, “How is the girdle of Truth a protecting power?” In this way: man is so constituted that he is made to be active. If he is not doing one thing, he is more than likely to be doing something else. In the case of the Christian, if he has not been thoroughly convinced that he is to be a servant of the Truth, eventually he will be influenced to be a servant of some other purpose in life, even though that purpose be solely one of self-interest. The piece of armor called the girdle of Truth, protects the mind against all teachings or tendencies which draw the Christian away from being a servant of the Truth. The girdle of Truth, therefore, is really a definite teaching of the Word of God. If the Christian understands this teaching, and brings his heart into harmony with the spirit and intent of it, he has set up in his mind a barrier to all hostile or intruding teachings. Thus the Christian is protected against every misleading and intriguing sophistry of the world and the Adversary. We might illustrate the point. All the leading highways in the United States are now numbered by the Federal Government. For instance there is one highway, number “99” which starts at Blaine, a small town in the Northwest tip of the State of Washington. This highway runs through the United States from north to south, terminating at the Mexican line in the Imperial Valley of

Southern California. If one were to be protected against losing his way on this highway, all he would need to know was that the number of the highway was “99”, and believing this he would watch for the number “99” sign all along the way. So with the Christian—if he is to be protected by the girdle of Truth, he must clearly understand that he is a servant of the Truth, and, believing this, he must act accordingly.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The second piece of armor is designated “the breastplate of righteousness” (V. 14). The fact that it is spoken of as a “breastplate” over the vital organs of the body (including the heart) suggests that it is extremely important. There are two very prominent teachings in the Bible covering the thought of righteousness. The first one relates to the righteousness that is in the perfect human sacrifice, the man Christ Jesus. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” He gave Himself a ransom sacrifice for Adam and his race. We being sinners, can approach God only through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We recognize that only as we are covered by the merit of our Lord Jesus, do we have a standing in God’s presence. Christ Jesus is spoken of as our Advocate, and an advocate is one who “stands beside” as an attorney pleading one’s cause. This is an important teaching, and protects us from all ideas which would engender in us a feeling of actual personal perfection—a dangerous thought indeed. It is good for us to know our condition and place, and our debt to God and Christ Jesus for redemption, giving us a standing in God’s presence. “The breastplate of righteousness” accomplishes this proper state of mind, and keeps us humble and thankful. The second prominent teaching, covering the thought of righteousness, is the one that teaches us that we must be righteous, just, honest in thought and motive. The Christian is to “love righteousness and hate iniquity,” even as the Lord did. This teaching, heartily accepted and made a very part of the character, will protect one when temptations present themselves to the mind. Many times subtle temptations may assail us to be a little dishonest or unjust for selfish reasons. If one has on the “breastplate of righteousness,” he will resist these temptations, and thus be protected from them.

Feet Shod

The third piece of armor is for the feet—“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” (V. 15) The word preparation is translated from a Greek word, the root of which means to prepare. Therefore the meaning would seem to be that this piece of armor prepares one to walk in the Narrow Christian Way. The explanation is beautiful and simple. The gospel of peace is really the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. It is good news indeed, to know that a literal kingdom is to be established here upon earth when God’s will (not selfish man’s will) shall be done here upon the earth as it is done in heaven. Then all wars and trouble and death will cease. In due time, those who “sleep in the dust of the earth” will awake under new conditions, when the Son of God shall be

King.

The Christian has been convinced of the truthfulness of this good news. He has accepted it. He has done more—he has responded to the invitation to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, which means that he stands for the same ideals and purposes that Jesus did. The Christian lays down his life in willing sacrifice in the service of God, which is the service of the Truth and in behalf of God's people. In connection with all this are certain precious promises of God's watchcare and affection. The precious promises also include the offer of a rich reward at the end of the Christian way, of "glory, honor and immortality." All of this—the good news of the coming Kingdom of God, the invitation to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer, and the precious promises—bring to the Christian a state of mind called "the peace of God." In the midst of the difficulties of life and the troubles in the world, and while he walks in the "valley of the shadow of death," the Christian has peace of mind. No wonder the third piece of armor is spoken of as sandals protecting the feet. Without the "peace of God" the Christian would not be prepared to go through such difficulties. God, in a very simple way, protects the Christian against discouragement, and provides him with joy, peace and hope.

In still another way the Christian is protected by the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace. The Christian is taught to use his faculty of combativeness to resist the tendencies of the old will to be selfish and self-reliant. He must be a fighter in the "good fight of faith." (1 Tim. 6:12) He must "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Tim. 2:3) However, he must not use his fighting qualities against his fellow man, but only against evil in himself, and in defense of the Truth. Therefore he is taught to be a peacemaker—"blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."—Matt. 5:9.

In disposition, the Christian is taught to prefer peace to an uncontrolled exercise of the faculty of combativeness. Thus the Christian is protected against any natural tendencies he might have to argue or fight just for the sake of opposing something. When the Christian understands that the ultimate object of discussion or resistance is to establish peace upon proper grounds, how it helps him to be self-controlled and kind! Even when the Christian finds it his duty to "speak sharply" he is protected against bitterness and unrighteous anger by the sandals of peace. How simple to explain, yet how mighty in effect, is each piece of armor for the Christian.'

Shield of Faith

The fourth piece of armor is "the shield of faith." (V. 16) "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." The apostle, in using the words "Above all," suggests that the shield is extremely important. How true! If one does not have faith, or confident belief in the teachings of the Bible, he is not

a Christian, neither can he stand the assaults of the Adversary. Faith is increased and strengthened in at least three ways: first, by the knowledge of the attributes of God as revealed by His plan of loving kindness; second, by a consideration of fulfilled prophecy; third, by the witness of the Spirit. In the first way, how it increases faith to understand that our Creator is loving and kind, even in permitting the reign of evil for a time! How our gratitude goes out to Him when we are assured that eventually this earth will be made a paradise, man's eternal home, and that the dead will be awakened from the tomb to live forever, if obedient to the laws of righteousness, the wicked being destroyed! How it increases faith to know that God's special reward to the Church—joint-heirship with His Son—is an evidence of His infinite wisdom, and generous love, and not an evidence that the non-elect (the world) are to suffer loss and cruel punishment!

In the second way, how it increases faith to understand prophecy and to be able to appreciate the significance of world events! More than 2,500 years ago, Daniel prophesied that in the time of the end (the end of man's rule, to give place to the Kingdom of God) there would be a “running to and fro—an increase of knowledge, and a time of trouble such as never was upon the earth.” And now the Christian can see the actual fulfillment of these events—in the modern conveniences, enabling man to “run to and fro” in automobiles, steamships, airplanes, etc.; and in the establishment of schools of learning—increasing man's knowledge; and in the distress of nations, which is indeed the greatest “time of trouble” the world has ever known.

In the third way, how it increases the Christian's faith to be able to detect in his life the witness of the Spirit! If he can trace in his life the fulfillment of the Spirit, the intention, the purpose of God (as revealed in the New Testament), then he has reason to rejoice and be full of confidence and trust. God has written us a letter, so to speak, in His Holy Word. A letter is one's mind or purpose expressed in words. If our minds (spirits) witness or show a fulfillment of God's purpose in us, then our spirit witnesses with God's Spirit that we are sons of God.

How much there is in this turbulent and changing world to challenge faith, unless faith is founded upon something sound and understandable! Increase of knowledge has stimulated the minds of all men to think. As a result religious beliefs have suffered. Nothing less than this could be expected, because not all religious belief was reasonable faith, but partly ignorance and much credulity. The Bible has suffered, too, because many had the erroneous thought that the Bible encouraged ignorance and credulity, which formerly, without knowledge, they thought was true Christian faith. In this time when knowledge has increased, the Christian has his portion of knowledge to enable him to exercise a strong faith in a reasonable and proved Bible.

The Helmet of Salvation

The fifth piece of armor is the “helmet of salvation.” (V. 17) As with the other pieces of armor, so with this one, the position gives us a clue as to its function in protecting the Christian. The “helmet” being worn upon the head suggests a protection in the form of knowledge, intelligence, information. Christians all down through the Gospel age have had knowledge from God’s Holy Word. This knowledge has been an explanation of God’s plan of salvation, enabling them to grasp His will concerning them.

It has been said (and well said, we believe), that in the end of the age, the Christian is provided with a much larger helmet than was provided for God’s people in the past. The explanation is obvious. We are living in a very different time. Daniel said that in the time of the end, knowledge would be increased. This is true. The disciple of Christ has need of a large helmet to enable him to stand in an intellectual world. The increase of knowledge has discredited many beliefs that were formerly thought to be well founded in Scripture. Just at the right time the Christian has been provided with concordances, Bible dictionaries, numerous translations of the Scriptures, and last, but not least, he has had access to the most exhaustive and convincing “Studies in the Scriptures” that has ever been written.

All of this is of tremendous importance to God’s people, in view of the numerous appeals to the mind from all quarters and on every subject. Libraries and second hand book stores give evidence of the time in which we are living. There are thousands of books, each one possessing a power to affect the mind in some way. How bewildered the Christian would be if he were not provided with the helmet of a proper knowledge of the Bible, the Word of God. His helmet proves that the Bible is true, shows what God’s plan of lovingkindness is, refutes arguments against the Bible, explains prophecy, and interprets the significance of world events. Thus Christian belief is founded upon proper knowledge which cannot be refuted.

The Sword of the Spirit

The sixth and final piece of armor is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” (V. 17) This is the only offensive piece of the Christian’s armor. It, like all other weapons, can be used properly or improperly. The sword of the Spirit is not intended to be used to cut and wound others, but is intended to be used in defense of one’s own position and for his own upbuilding. Our Lord Jesus gave us an illustration of its use in defense of His position. Let us observe carefully the example He set us. Turning to Matt. 4:1-10 we read: “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungered. And when the Tempter came to Him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the

temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, it is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, Satan taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto Him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”

We would understand, of course, that these temptations were suggestions to our Lord’s mind by the Adversary. We know our minds are capable of forming pictures in the imagination, in response to word pictures used by others. So it was in the case of our Lord. He was not literally taken to a pinnacle of the temple, nor was He literally taken to a mountain top. Rather, His mind formed impressions suggested by the Adversary. It is important to observe the use our Lord made of the sword of the Spirit in resisting the temptations. Not once did He bitterly accuse or threaten Satan. Instead, He counteracted the Adversary’s argument with well chosen and properly applied Scripture. In all three temptations He vanquished the devil’s malevolent intent with “it is written”—the sword of the Spirit. Satan used the sword of the Spirit, too, in the second temptation; but he misapplied it in his attempt to inveigle our Lord into unrighteousness.

The sword of the Spirit is also for the purpose of destroying everything contrary to the knowledge of God, that every thought may be brought into full obedience to Christ. We read from 2 Cor. 10:3-5: “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 strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” So we see the purpose of the sword of the Spirit, according to this Scripture, is to nullify all teachings and influences that are subversive of the knowledge of God, which knowledge would have the effect of bringing our very thoughts into obedience to Christ.

In conclusion then, we would understand that each defensive piece of armor is a character-teaching from the Bible, which, accepted and acted upon, erects in the mind of the Christian, an effective barrier to all opposing teachings and influences. The armor itself is contained in the Word of God; but in order to protect, it must be strapped upon one—each piece thereby be coming essentially a very part of the character and disposition. In this respect, many make a mistake—they know where the armor is and what it is, but they do not take the trouble to strap it on, to make it a component part of themselves; and, as a consequence, they readily succumb to opposition, not even realizing that they are being overcome.

Having on the armor, means that one is alive as a Christian soldier, alert to danger, and able thereby and therewith to defend himself. When the armor is properly worn, a state of mind is created, which is quite as important as the armor itself. Our Lord was forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, weak and impoverished physically, yet when He came forth He was strong in mind, fortified by the Word and Spirit of God. The Christian must be an entity, molded around the Word and Spirit of God. If this thought is fully grasped or comprehended, then we know the means by which we are strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.