

War Zone

Part 7 – The Armour of God (Part 3)

Eph 6:10-18

ILLUS – Luke 10:1-20 Jesus sent out the 70 to heal the sick, preach about the Kingdom of God, and cast out evil spirits. Jesus gave them tremendous authority, but when they saw what happened when they used the name of Jesus on evil spirits, they were really excited. So the 70 returned to Jesus in this really excited state: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” Jesus’ reply must have seemed a bit strange to them: “I’ve given you authority over all the power of the enemy. But don’t be excited about that. Be excited that your names are written in the book of life.”

What’s the most important thing in your life? The money God’s given you? Family? Job? Business? Gifts and abilities? Your ministry? Seeing miracles happen? Jesus said, “Rejoice because of this: Your names are written in the book of life.” Your salvation is most important.

In fact, it’s part of a weapon.

The Armour Of God

5. The helmet of salvation [vs17]

Description – The helmet, which for the Roman soldier was made of bronze and had cheek pieces, provided protection for another vital part, the head¹.

The helmet, of course, protects your mind.

Your mind is important, especially since we’ve already seen that the battle takes place there.

It’s in your mind that temptation takes place, and it’s in your mind that the enemy seeks to build strongholds.

So how do we protect it? With the helmet of salvation.

This is just going to be a basic overview to salvation.

Salvation begins with grace.

I want to look at two aspects of grace.

To really understand the grace of God we need to have an understanding of the vast gulf that exists between people and God.

We need to really grasp the reality of our own sinfulness.

ILLUS – Luke 7:36-47 – Jesus was invited to Simon the Pharisee’s house. Was the Pharisee any better than the woman? No. But he thought he was. The greater your understanding of your own sinfulness, the more you’ll appreciate what God has done for you in Christ.

Isaiah 1:4-6 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. (5) Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. (6) From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

What’s this passage about? God is painting a picture of our sinfulness.

Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

¹ Lincoln, Andrew T. *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians* p450

There it is again.

God couldn't be talking about us, could He?

He must be talking about some bad guys: Killers and rapists and bank robbers and politicians ... just kidding about the politicians.

Luke 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Who's Jesus talking to here? His own disciples!

If I asked you to repeat after me: "I am evil," that's hard to say, isn't it?

But except for the righteousness that Jesus gave us as a gift, it's true.

We all like to come to church and look good, got on our Sunday best and our best smiles, but inside we know that we often fall short of the mark.

I've discovered a paradox in the Kingdom of God: The more like Christ I become, the more unlike Christ I realise I am.

When I first came to Jesus I knew that I was a sinner, but I didn't think I was too bad.

I thought I was a pretty good guy.

But as you walk with God I've discovered that your understanding grows in two key areas.

I begin to understand how incredibly high God's standard really is, and I also begin to realise how deeply sinful I really am.

My knowledge of Him grows, and my knowledge of me grows, and that gap just keeps getting wider.

Now it's not really getting wider – I'm actually becoming more like Jesus – but because of the growth in my understanding, it seems to be getting wider all the time.

That's a good thing, and it brings us back to our story.

ILLUS – This lady comes to Jesus and she's overwhelmed with her sinfulness, but she receives forgiveness. And she's just so aware of His grace that she loves Him deeply. On the other hand, Simon the Pharisee, he thinks he's a good guy. But is he really any better than she is? No, he has the same sick head and deceitful heart that she has. He's just not aware of it. And so he never receives forgiveness and he never understands God's grace.

If you want to put on that helmet of salvation, get a grasp of the grace of God.

Realise the depths of your own sinfulness; the more you do, the more you'll understand grace.

Grace is one of the most difficult things to understand, because we have been conditioned against it all our lives.

ILLUS – Why would you be selected for a sports team? Because you're good at it. Why would you be admitted into a university course? Because your grades warranted it. Why would you get a promotion at work? Same deal. Because you've proven yourself worthy.

From the moment you were born, there was a system of rewards and punishments depending on your behaviour.

There were school grades, IQ tests, high school ratings, trophies.

All of these were given out according to what you deserved.

But God has a different system.

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ILLUS – Imagine that Michael Jordan comes to town and wants to select the best basketball team ever. You love basketball and you're lucky enough to have front row seats for the selection. There's a whole row of

basketball greats lined up, and guess what? They're lined up right in front of you. MJ comes out, the crowd roars. He's going to start choosing. He surveys the line-up. He walks straight ahead, pushes through the players, looks you right in the eye and says, "I want you." The crowd goes, "Whaa?" You say, "But I can't even play basketball." "But I want you." That's what God did. He pushed through the crowd of great people in the world, who thought they would be selected because of their greatness, power, talent, looks, intelligence ... And He chose you, and me.

1 Cor 1:26-29

The second thing I want to look at is what theologians call "prevenient" grace – "the grace that 'precedes and prepares' any Godward inclination in man."²

Before you ever even think about whether you should become a Christian, God is at work in your life preparing the way.

ILLUS – God was working in my life when I was a little boy in a little village in a little village in Wales. He knew that one day I would need to be listening to a young guy named Robin in a coffee shop in Australia. How He got me there is another story, but He did. And all the time, He was preparing my heart. That's prevenient grace.

That's what God was doing for you, preparing you to receive His salvation.

In fact, He chose you before you were born.

Eph 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

ILLUS – When I was a boy, we'd play soccer or some other game. And the boys would line up for the captain of each team to choose their players. And I remember the feeling of relief when you were chosen and how proud you'd feel if you were the first or one of the first to be chosen for the team. But then it got to the last one or two. And they usually weren't liked as much as anybody else or weren't as good at sport. So the two captains would argue about who would have these last boys because neither of them wanted them on their team. And you'd feel sorry for them because you know yourself that it doesn't ever feel good not to be wanted.

ILLUS – Isn't it good to know God wants you on His team? That before the foundation of the world, God looked through time, and He saw you, and He saw me, and He said, "I'll take him. I'll take her." He didn't leave you till last. He chose you before you even lined up. What a relief to know that you and I didn't get in by accident. That when you came to the Lord to give your heart to Him, God wasn't there saying, "Let's see, he's repented, he's believing, confessing Jesus as Lord. Aw, darn it, he's fulfilled all the conditions. Now I'll have to honour My word, now I'll have to accept him. And him of all people. He's the last one I would have chosen. How do I get myself into these fixes?" No, God chose you. You've been selected, part of the team, and it's better than any sports team could ever be.

This subject is so huge, but we're going to have to move on and leave it for another day.

But this is what I want you to know: If you want to protect your mind with the helmet of salvation, you need to have a firm grasp of the grace of God.

6. The sword of the Spirit [vs17]

The sword of the Spirit is the word of God.

Description – The sharp short sword ... was the crucial offensive weapon in close combat. ... The Spirit is not so much the one who supplies the sword ... but the one who gives it its effectiveness, its cutting edge³.

A friend of mine used to always say, "I'd give you a battle of wits, except I never fight an unarmed man."

The enemy has no such scruples; nothing delights him more than being able to find and fight an unarmed man.

Out of our entire list so far – all six weapons – this is the only exclusively offensive weapon mentioned so far.

² Hammond, T.C. *In Understanding Be Men* IVP: London 1968 p137

³ Lincoln, Andrew T. *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians* p451

Let's have a look at some things about God's Word.

1. Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God's Word is amazing; in the hands of the Holy Spirit it's used with the skill and precision of the supreme Master Surgeon.

You can be sitting in church, a word is spoken, and it can change your life.

Hebrews says that God's Word is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And we really need that.

When the enemy's constant tactic is to build strongholds in our minds through temptation, God's Word can come in and cut away the undergrowth and suddenly you see a stronghold.

2. You use the sword to deflect temptation.

ILLUS – Have you seen Star Wars? Don't you love the way those Jedi knights use those light sabres? The bad guy's there shooting at them, and they just keep deflecting all their bullets. Jesus did exactly that when He was tempted by the devil, and His response each time was to quote God's Word: "It is written." The devil started shooting at Him, and all He did was take out His sword, "It is written, it is written, it is written."

3. Rom 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

This is interesting: Faith is derived from the Word of God.

That means that if you don't have your sword, you don't have your shield either.

The sword and the shield go together – faith and God's Word go together.

So if you want to be a person of faith, you need to be a person of the Word.

If you're not, let me give you some practical steps to help you become a person of the Word.

1. Pray that God will give you a love of His Word. You need the Holy Spirit's help.

Ps 138:2 I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

2. Don't get bogged down in things you don't understand.

ILLUS – How many of you like fish? So you're eating some whiting and you come across a bone, what do you do? Throw away the fish? No, you take the bone out and put it on the side of your plate. It's the same with God's Word. Read it and try to understand it. But when you come across something you don't understand don't get bogged down with it. Ask the Lord to help you understand, maybe even ask someone who knows a bit more than you do. But if you still don't understand, don't get bogged down with it.

3. Recognise that God's Word works very much according to the principle of sowing and reaping. Gal 6:7-9 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (8) For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (9) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

When will you reap? I don't know; in God's good time.

But the key is: don't grow weary, don't lose heart and give up; trust God for it to happen.

Set aside a time every day where you can undistractedly read the Word of God.

4. Don't set out with unrealistic expectations: Don't say, "From now on I'm going to read 10 chapters a day." That's not realistic – most people will be incapable of sustaining that. And all you'll do is end up feeling like you've failed.

So what do you do? Most Bibles have headings dividing all the sections.

Read one section – often that won't even be a whole chapter.

Then think about it. What!!! Think about it?

Yes, think about God's Word, because that's much more effective than the person who says, "I read 10 chapters today." "Really? What did you read?" "Er, um, I don't know. But I read them."

5. Ask the Lord to teach you – you might get something straight away – but chances are, what God wants to say to you might come back at a later date. Leave the timing to Him, but trust Him to teach you.

Now when it comes to the armour of God, I've discovered that lots of Christians don't really understand how to put it on.

Enter another Christian superstition.

Do you remember what a superstition is?

A superstition is a belief based on emotion (especially fear) rather than reality.

I've heard preaching that says that the way to do it is to every morning imagine that you're putting on the armour of God.

See yourself putting on the helmet, breastplate, taking up the sword ... in short, visualisation.

It may make you feel good, but I have to tell you that this is really just playing mind games.

God's not interested in our mental gymnastics; He's interested in our lifestyle.

And Paul's not talking here about our imagination – he's talking about our lifestyle.

ILLUS – When I was a boy, my mother used to read us fairy tales. And most of them came from Anderson or Grimm. I remember the one called The Emperor's New Clothes. The emperor was a proud man and always loved to be splendidly dressed. He always used the empire's best tailors. Then he asked the tailors for something better than anyone had seen before because he was having a parade. So they told him about a magic weave that was invisible to anyone who was incompetent in his job. So when the emperor tried on his new clothes, no one could admit that he was actually naked. Not even the emperor.

Many Christians are like that emperor; each morning they go through a mental routine putting on their armour, but the enemy watches on and knows that they are still naked, no armour.

So if you're interested in daily putting on your armour, let me tell you how.

This is how you do a real inventory as to whether or not you're wearing your armour.

You need to ask the Holy Spirit to help you to search your heart as you ask yourself some probing questions.

Truth – Am I a person of truth? Do I tell the truth or do I tell lies? Do I tell little white lies? Do I tell half-truths? Do I cheat on my Tax Return? When people face me up with the truth about myself, do I listen, pray about it and ask God for help, or do I react and reject what they are saying?

Do you see where we're headed here?

The armour of God is not a little game we play; it's real life.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness – Am I certain of God's gift of righteousness to me? (Imputed righteousness) Do I make an honest attempt to be obedient to the Lord? (Imparted righteousness)

Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace – Am I prepared with the gospel of peace? Do I understand what the gospel is? Do I share my faith?

Taking the shield of faith – Am I trusting the Lord regardless of my circumstances?

The helmet of salvation – Am I secure in my salvation? Do I fully understand my sinfulness and the amazing grace of God?

The sword of the Spirit – Is God's Word an important part of my life? Am I honestly trying to live by it?