

Chapter 9

Armour for What?

That you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil

Let me show you a more excellent way.

We are in a battle, but God has not left us undefended. He has given us everything we need to overcome. God has given us spiritual armour so we can fight. If we are to stand against the attack of Satan then we are commanded to put it on.

The belt of truth. Satan will come against us with all kinds of lies and discouragements. John 8:44 tells us that *'when he speaks a lie he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.'* Many times his words sound like the truth. When he tempted Jesus in the desert, he distorted biblical truth. *"If you are the Son of God throw Yourself down, for it is written, 'He shall give His angels charge over You'"*. However, Jesus countered with the truth. He used the Bible in the right way and spoke the truth. *"It is written again..."* Satan will come against us with what sounds like truth and reason to distract us from our work of building the kingdom of God.

The enemies of God used the same tactics when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem had tried their best to discourage Nehemiah and stop the work of building, but failed. So they tried another tactic. Lies! This did not stop the rebuilding either, so they came with a religious argument saying, *"Come let us meet in the temple. They are coming to kill you. You will be safe there."* It seemed reasonable to take sanctuary in the temple. It seemed like good spiritual advice but it was devised to stop the work of God.

Many times religious work and activity will actually distract from building the kingdom of God. In many churches when God speaks a committee is formed. Often, a committee is a convenient way of talking about what God has said until we can find a way of not doing it. I have sat on many church committees in my time and must admit that while some good work did come from them much was purely mundane. I have known churches spend millions of pounds changing a church structure but have no budget for mission or evangelism or the poor. "Well," they say ' "God has not given us the vision for that." When did they rewrite their bible?

The belt of truth is not just a piece of armour as many teach. As we speak the truth we are actively attacking the enemy's ranks. The truth will help us to stand against the wiles of Satan.

The breastplate of righteousness. It is easy to say, because it is true, that Jesus Christ is our righteousness. Because this Ephesian passage talks about armour, the church takes it as being purely for defensive purposes. Even a cursory study of history will show that when a knight or a soldier put on his armour it was not because he wanted protection for his daily chores. He did not put on his armour to sit at the table and eat

his food, or to chop wood or to go to bed. When he put on his armour it was because he was going to fight. There was a battle to be fought.

The church has over the years looked at the individual pieces of armour and taught that it is for our protection for our daily living. We are encouraged to put on the armour every day so that we will be protected. This is not bad advice, but it misses the point. We are to put on the armour daily because we expect to be in a battle daily. Eugene Peterson, the author of *The Message* understood this in his paraphrase: *'You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued'*. He sees every piece of armour as a weapon. A soldier does not wear his armour in the barracks but on the field of battle. Jesus said that He would build His church and *'the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.'* When walking through the streets of London, I have never been attacked by gates. It does not happen. Gates are passive! The gates of Hades do not come off their hinges and attack the church. The church body are supposed to be the ones that are storming the gates of hell. We need the armour for offence and not for defence.

The breastplate of righteousness will give us protection if we actively live in the way that the Lord commands us. Whilst Jesus is our righteousness, we must actively live holy lives honouring to God. The breastplate is the piece of armour that goes over the heart. Proverbs 4:23 says that we should 'guard our hearts'. I like the way that *The Message* puts it. *'Keep vigilant watch over your heart.'* We do this by living Godly in Christ Jesus. The measure of protection the breastplate of righteousness will give us depends on the degree in which we choose to live in holiness.

The shoes of the Good News of peace. I love the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C S Lewis. The imagination and the analogies are delightful. The children are in no doubt that they are in a battle. It sometimes seems everything is against them and they cannot possibly win, but all the animals and other beings have different strengths and when they are all doing their part calling on the name of Aslan (Jesus) they overcome. The giant's play their part. Because of their size they are awkward, but they put on their boots and are able to tread down the enemy. The part they play is invaluable. I can imagine them putting on their great big boots before going out into battle.

We also put on what I will call our Gospel shoes. The Gospel is a powerful weapon. It is called the Gospel of peace. Every time that we put our beautiful feet into our Gospel shoes and go out and proclaim the Gospel whether to many or to few we are advancing the kingdom of God. Every man, woman or child who receives Jesus on hearing the Gospel is added to the number in our army. The kingdom of darkness is weakened and the kingdom of God is strengthened. The Gospel shoes, like the rest of the armour are for action not defence.

In the time of Elisha there was a great famine in the city because the king of Syria had besieged Samaria. Food was gone and there was great desperation. Living between Samaria and the army of Syria were four lepers. They too were suffering hunger because no-one was able to give them the usual charity. In their hunger they decided to take action. They were between a rock and a hard place. They reckoned that if they stayed where they were they would die. If they went to the Syrian camp and were killed, nothing worse could happen. So they went to the Syrian camp. When they arrived they found that God had sent confusion and the whole army had fled in haste

leaving everything behind. Good news! They had all they wanted to eat and took from the valuable things left behind and hid them for themselves. They went back for more. Then they remembered the people that had helped them when they could and given them charity. They said to one another, “*We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent*”. They went to Samaria and told them the good news and the people were saved as they found all they needed in the Syrian camp. God chose four insignificant outcasts to bring deliverance to his people.

Have you ever heard it said, or maybe said yourself, “I am waiting for God to open a door.” Let me also tell you what Jesus said. “Open your eyes! Look and see! The fields are white for harvest.” The door is open – in fact many doors are open! As I see it there are too many doors open. I am waiting for Him to close a few doors. Too many use this expression as an excuse for doing nothing. I am waiting can be interpreted as ‘Do not disturb me. I am comfortable and besides, what difference can I make? I don’t have the resources.’

One day, Jesus had been teaching all day and now the people were hungry and tired. He said to the disciples “Give them something to eat.” The disciples told Him it is impossible. There are 5,000 people and we have no food. Besides, we would need more money than we have ever had before. There was a small boy in the crowd who had been so intent on listening to Jesus that he had forgotten to eat his lunch. He had five small loaves and two little fish. He could have sat there and said to himself, ‘At least I have my own food. I will eat it and go home. It is not my problem and besides, what is this among so many people?’ He did not! He put the little he had in the hands of Jesus. No excuses! No waiting for doors to open. He acted. He made up his mind that he would do the little he could. He did not wait until he had enough. Jesus was enough.

Church, we are a people of Good News. Not everyone is called to be an evangelist, but Jesus opened a door for each one of us when He said, “You shall be my witnesses.” We do not do right when we keep it to ourselves. He opened another when He said, “In that you have done it (visited the sick, fed the hungry, and clothed the naked) to the least person, you have done it unto Me!” As we put on our Gospel shoes we will be entering the spiritual battle and bringing salvation to many.

The shield of faith. Not many homes had a television in the years following the war. I was nearly six years old the first time I saw a television. It was very small with a yellowish picture and a big magnifying glass in front to increase the size of the picture. We watched the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in awe. We crowded into the house of a neighbour. I was fascinated. Our first television arrived when I was about ten years old. It was a great day. One of my favourite programmes was ‘Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans’. I do not remember much of the stories now, but one incident stuck in my mind and caused me great fear, although by today’s standards it was very mild. I do not know how children sleep with all the demonic images that pass for children’s entertainment these days and Christian parents allow their children to be bombarded with these diabolical stories. The Mohicans were attacking a grass roofed house that Hawkeye was staying in. Their method was to shoot burning arrows onto the roof and set the house on fire. It disturbed me. I would lie awake sometimes afraid that maybe our home was not as safe as I thought.

Someone could set it on fire from the outside while we were still inside asleep. I did not have a shield of faith.

One of our weapons is such a shield so that we can quench the fiery darts of the enemy. Again, if there was no enemy there would not be need of a shield.

What are these fiery darts that Satan throws at us? They are his temptations; those furious suggestions of evil; the enticement of the false excitement to sin. They are blasphemous thoughts, unbelief, sudden temptation to do wrong, thoughts that wound and torment the soul. They come suddenly, like arrows fired from a bow. They come from unexpected quarters, like arrows shot suddenly from an enemy in ambush. They pierce, penetrate, and torment the soul, as arrows that are on fire. They set the soul on fire, and bring to the surface our worst desires and lusts.

The only way to quench them is with the shield of faith. It is with a confidence in God and His Word. It is by relying on his gracious promises. It is not by our own strength. We will stand in the strength of the Lord and in the power of His might.

The helmet of salvation. This is protection for our heads and minds. I love the story of David and Goliath. I am not very tall and so love it when the little guy wins. The worldly king Saul is afraid of the giant but sends the spiritual king David to fight for him. King Saul, it says, is head and shoulders above every man in Israel and King David is a small shepherd boy, not yet old enough to serve in the army – but he has the anointing of a King! Before Saul allows David to go and fight, Saul gives him his armour. I have a picture of this young boy putting on the king's armour. When he puts on the helmet it must have come down over his eyes. When he moved his head the helmet stayed still! It would offer him no protection. Spiritual David was trying to protect himself with worldly protection and it would not serve him.

That is why Jesus tells us that we must be born again. Membership of a particular denomination or congregation will not give you salvation. Your denomination or church or ministry or leaders will not save you. Salvation is found in no other name than the Name of Jesus. Without the 'hope of salvation' (1 Thessalonians 5:8) we have no protection for our minds. The knowledge of our salvation will protect our minds. The helmet is a defence for the head against false doctrines.

The sword of the Spirit. This is the Word of God. We have seen how Jesus used the word when He was tempted. We need the interpretation of the Spirit to use it correctly. Satan, when he tempted Jesus, used the word incorrectly, without the discernment or interpretation of the Holy Spirit. It has been his method from the beginning of time. He came to Eve and re-interpreted the Word of God. "You shall not surely die."

Too much modern scholarship is trying to reinterpret the Bible. We have trouble with morality because theologians, many of whom are not born again, do not or cannot interpret the Bible with the discernment and interpretation of the Holy Spirit. There was a notorious bishop in England some twenty years ago who caused an uproar in the church because he tried to redefine the virgin birth and resurrection as events that did not physically take place but are allegorical stories to help us to understand spiritual truth. What arrogant balderdash!

Paul wrote to Timothy that he should 'study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' (2 Timothy 2:15). The study of which he spoke was not, philosophy, sociology, psychology, theology or any other ...ology, but the Word of God – the Bible. It is when we humbly

submit ourselves to the Word of God under the anointing of the Holy Spirit we will then fully understand it and know how to use it as a most powerful weapon.