

Strength and Protection in Christ

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”
—Ephesians 6:10,11

FOR THOSE STRIVING TO follow in the footsteps of the Master, and who are engaged at this time in developing the mind of Christ, it is of utmost importance to realize that our great Adversary, the devil, is making every effort within his power to stumble and defeat us. It was so with Jesus, and it is no less so with us. To help combat this formidable foe, our Heavenly Father has provided us, through the Scriptures, the illustration of a soldier's armor. A soldier's armor in our Lord's day was made up of numerous items, and each of these served an important purpose. If any piece was not worn properly, the soldier would be vulnerable to attack, perhaps resulting in his death, by the enemy.

The “armor of God” also has numerous pieces. Each of these is vital in the conquering of the great enemy—Satan. Looking back at the life of Jesus, the “captain of our salvation,” although he was a perfect man, he saw the necessity for wearing this symbolic armor. In doing so, he was ever prepared for the attacks of Satan, whether direct, or through those whom the Adversary used to do his bidding. Jesus’ mind was firmly set in this regard, fully realizing the “wiles of the devil.” Thus, to have Christ’s mind developed in us, also means a constant vigilance and awareness of our great enemy. Further, it means that we, as did our Captain, must continually wear the spiritual armor provided by our all-wise Heavenly Father.

PROTECTION FOR THE NEW CREATURE—NOT THE FLESH

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, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (II Cor. 5:17) 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. 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 then examine each piece of this symbolic armor, and as we do so, we shall find that the proper use of each piece serves as a mighty protecting power.

GIRDLE OF TRUTH

The first piece of armor is the girdle of truth. (Eph. 6:14) In olden times, a girdle was a cloth garment, similar to a belt, used to bind up the robes and other outer garments while work was being performed. Therefore a girdle is a fitting symbol of work or servitude. The girdle of truth signifies that, as Christians, we are servants of the Truth. We find this clearly taught in the Bible—as Christians, we are “ambassadors for Christ,” holding forth the “word of reconciliation.” (II Cor. 5:18-20; Phil. 2:16) One may ask, “How is the girdle of truth a protecting power to the New Creature?” In answering this, we first must realize that man is so constituted that he is made to be active. If he is not active in doing one thing, he is more than likely active in 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 may be solely one of self-interest. The piece of armor called the girdle of truth protects the new mind—the

New Creature—against all teachings or tendencies which draw the Christian away from being a servant of the Truth.

The girdle of truth, in totality, is comprised of the teachings of the Word of God. If the Christian understands these teachings, and brings his heart into harmony with the spirit and intent of them, he has set up in his mind a barrier to all hostile or intruding teachings. Thus the follower of Christ is protected against every misleading and intriguing sophistry of the world and the Adversary. We might illustrate the point in this way: if one were to be “protected” against losing his way on a highway, he would need to know the designated number of the road, as shown on a map, which would take him to his intended destination. He would then watch for that road number sign all along the way. So with the Christian—if he is to be protected by the girdle of the truth, he must clearly understand that he is a servant of the Truth. Believing this, and looking to the Scriptures for direction, he must act in accordance with the guidelines of the Word of God.

BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The second piece of armor is designated “the breastplate of righteousness.” (Eph. 6:14) 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 concerning the thought of righteousness. The first one relates to the righteousness found in the perfect sacrifice of the man Christ Jesus. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) He gave himself

a ransom sacrifice for Adam and his race. We, being sinners by nature, can approach God only through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We recognize that, only as we are covered by the merit of his sacrifice, do we have a standing in God's presence. 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, the only means whereby we have a standing before our Heavenly Father. "The breastplate of righteousness" accomplishes this proper state of mind, and keeps us humble and thankful.

The second prominent teaching concerning the thought of righteousness is that which teaches us to be righteous, just, honest, in thought and motive—and to the greatest extent possible, in action and word. As followers of the Master, we are to love righteousness and hate iniquity, even as he did. This teaching, if heartily accepted and made an integral part of our character, will protect us as New Creatures when temptations present themselves to our mind. Many times we may be assailed by subtle temptations to be a little dishonest or unjust for selfish reasons. If we have on the "breastplate of righteousness," we will resist these temptations, and thus be protected from them.

ARMOR FOR THE FEET

The third piece of armor is for the feet. "[Have] your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." (Eph. 6:15) The word "preparation" is

translated from a Greek word, the root of which means to prepare or make ready. Therefore, the meaning would seem to be that this piece of armor prepares us, or makes us ready, to walk in the narrow way of Christ's footsteps. The explanation is beautiful and simple. The gospel of peace is the good news of the coming kingdom of God. It is good news, indeed, to know that a kingdom is to be established upon earth in which God's righteous will—not selfish man's will—shall be done, even 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" (Dan. 12:2), will awake under these new conditions of God's kingdom, under the rulership of his son, Christ Jesus, and his faithful body members, the "little flock."

The consecrated child of God has been convinced of the truthfulness of this good news. He has accepted it, but 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. He lays down his life in willing sacrifice in the service of God, which is the service of the Truth and on behalf of God's people. In connection with all this are certain precious promises of God's watch care and affection. These precious promises also include the offer of a rich reward at the end of the narrow way—"glory and honour and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) 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 footstep follower of Christ a state of mind called "the peace of God." (Phil. 4:7) In the midst of the difficulties

of life, and the trouble in the world, and while he walks in the “valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23:4) 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 child of God would not be prepared to go through such difficulties. Thus, God, in a very simple way, protects his consecrated people against discouragement, and provides them with joy, peace, and hope.

A PEACEFUL CONFLICT

In still another way, we are protected by the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace. The Scriptures teach us to use our faculty of combativeness to resist the tendencies of the old will to be selfish and self-reliant. We must be a fighter in the “good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) We must “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) However, we must not use our fighting qualities against our fellowman, but only against evil in ourselves, and in defense of the Truth. Therefore we are taught to be peacemakers: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”—Matt. 5:9

In developing the mind of Christ, we are taught to prefer peace to an uncontrolled exercise of the faculty of combativeness. Thus we are protected against any natural tendencies we might have to argue or fight just for the sake of opposing something. When we understand that the ultimate object of discussion or resistance is to establish peace upon proper grounds, how it helps us to be self-controlled and kind. Even when we may find it our

duty to “speak sharply,” we are protected against bitterness and unrighteous anger by the sandals of peace. How simple to explain, yet how mighty in effect, is this piece of armor!

SHIELD OF FAITH

The fourth piece of armor is “the shield of faith.” Paul says, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” (Eph. 6:16) The apostle, in using the words “Above all,” suggests that the shield is extremely important. If we do not have faith, or confident belief in the teachings of the Bible, then in reality we are not a follower of Christ, neither can we 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 loving plan of salvation for all mankind; second, by a consideration of fulfilled prophecy in harmony with that plan; and third, by the witness of God’s Spirit in the individual experiences of our lives.

In the first way, how it increases our faith to understand that the 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 by his Word 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. How it increases our faith to know that God’s special reward to the bride of Christ—that of joint-heirship with his Son—is an evidence of his infinite wisdom, and not an evidence that the

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(Continued from page 31) non-elect of the world are to suffer loss and cruel punishment.

In the second way, how it increases our faith to understand prophecy and to be able to appreciate the significance of world events, as they fit into the spectrum of God's plan. More than twenty-five centuries ago, Daniel prophesied that in the "time of the end,"—that is, the end of this present evil world, which would give place to the kingdom of God—many "shall run to and fro, . . . knowledge shall be increased," and there shall be "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:4,1) Today, the Lord's consecrated people can see the actual fulfillment of these prophetic words in the many events of the last century and a half. During this time, we have seen with our own eyes exponential increases in man's ability to "run to and fro" by all forms of transportation. We have seen an explosion in man's ability to gain knowledge, particularly by means of electronic communication, and the nearly endless supply of information available at the touch of a computer, or by electronic devices no larger than the human hand. We have seen also the ever-increasing distress of nations, resulting in the current "time of trouble,"—the greatest period of trouble the world has ever known.

In the third way, how it increases our faith to be able to detect in our lives the witness of the Spirit. If we can trace in our life the evidences of the Holy Spirit's influence—the intention and purpose of God for us—then we have reason to rejoice and be full of confidence and trust. God's purpose for us is outlined in his Holy Word. These words of our loving Heavenly Father are especially addressed to us.

If our minds bear witness, or show a fulfillment, of God's purpose in us as expressed in his Word, then our spirit witnesses with God's Holy Spirit that "we are the children of God."—Rom. 8:16

There is much in this turbulent and changing world to challenge faith, and the shielding protection it should provide, if it were founded upon something sound and understandable. The "increase of knowledge" prophesied by Daniel has stimulated the minds of all to think. Yet, much of this thinking, and the so-called "knowledge" resulting from it, has been along the lines of error, and out of harmony with the knowledge of God contained in his Word. As a result, confidence in religious beliefs has suffered. Nothing less than this should be expected, however, because most religious belief is not based on reasonable "substance" and "evidence" (Heb. 11:1), but on ignorance and credulity. Reliance upon the Bible has suffered as a result, because the teachings generally accepted as true Christian faith have been seen to be based upon contradictory and illogical thinking, and it is supposed that the Scriptures encourage such ignorance and credulity. How thankful we are, though, that in this time when knowledge has increased, we have been provided "meat in due season" (Matt. 24:45), and have been given a portion of knowledge more than sufficient to enable us to exercise a strong faith in a reasonable and proven Bible.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

The fifth piece of armor is the "helmet of salvation." (Eph. 6:17) As with the other pieces of armor, so with this one, the position gives us a clue to its

function in protecting us from the attacks of the Adversary. The “helmet” being worn upon the head suggests a protection in the form of knowledge, intelligence, and information. True followers of Christ 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—a knowledge sufficient to enable each to grasp the Heavenly Father’s will concerning them.

Now, in this “time of the end” spoken of by Daniel, we continue to need the benefits provided by this symbolic helmet. We, as disciples of Christ, have special need of this helmet to enable us to stand in an intellectual world, one full of “foolish” wisdom. The increase of knowledge has discredited many beliefs that were formerly thought to be well founded in the Scriptures. Just at the right time, however, God has provided earnest Bible Students with concordances, Bible dictionaries, and numerous translations of the Scriptures. More than even this, God in his providence has given us access to exhaustive and convincing *Studies in the Scriptures*.

This is of tremendous importance to God’s people, in view of the many appeals to have our minds filled from other quarters than the Word of God. There are tens of thousands of books, websites, blogs, and opinions—all available at the touch of a computer—each one possessing the power to affect the mind in some way. How bewildered we would be if we were not provided with the helmet of a proper knowledge of the Bible, the Word of God. Our helmet proves that the Bible is true. It shows what God’s plan of salvation is, and refutes arguments against the Scriptures. It explains prophecy, and even

interprets the significance of many world events. Suffice it to say that without the helmet, we would be in total confusion, and easy prey for the attacks of the Adversary.

ONLY OFFENSIVE PIECE OF ARMOR

The final piece of armor is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph. 6:17) 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 one’s 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 Matthew 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 hungry. 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, the devil 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 understand that these temptations were suggestions to our Lord’s mind by the Adversary. We do not believe the Lord was literally taken to a pinnacle of the Temple, or that he was literally taken to a mountaintop. Rather, his mind formed impressions of these things suggested by the Adversary. Most importantly, though, we 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 also used the sword of the Spirit, or so it seemed, in the second temptation. However, he misapplied the Word of God in his attempt to stumble our Lord into unrighteousness.

CASTING DOWN IMAGINATIONS

The sword of the Spirit is also for the purpose of destroying those things in our character which are contrary to the knowledge of God, that every thought may be brought into full obedience to Christ. We read Paul’s words, “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;) 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.” (II Cor. 10:3-5) Thus we see that the purpose of the sword of the Spirit, according to this Scripture, is to nullify all teachings and influences, even those within our own hearts and minds, that would subvert the knowledge of God. Such use of this sword should have the effect of bringing our “every thought” into obedience to Christ.

Thus, we would understand that each piece of armor, when accepted and utilized, erects in our mind an effective barrier to all opposing teachings and influences. As we have discussed, the armor itself is contained in the Word of God. However, in order to protect us, it must be “put on,” as stated in our opening text. Each piece must become essential to us and a very part of our character and disposition. In this respect, some have made a mistake. They know where the armor is and what it is, but they do not take the trouble to put it on, thus failing to make it a component part of themselves. As a consequence, they readily succumb to opposition, not even realizing that they are being overcome.

In concluding his discussion of this subject, Paul cites one more critical element which helps us to put on—and keep on—all the pieces of armor God has provided. He states, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (Eph. 6:18) Prayer and supplication, as well as watching, are vital to the proper placement

and use of each piece of the armor, not only on behalf of ourselves, but also “for all saints,” as together we battle against the forces of Satan. This communion with God, through prayer, is our life-line in the battlefield of life. Without it, even with the armor, we would surely succumb to the enemy eventually.

Having on the armor, and exercising the privilege of prayer, means that we are alive as a soldier of Christ, alert to danger, and able thereby to defend ourselves. When the armor is properly worn, a state of mind is created, which is nearly as important as the armor itself. Our Lord was forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, weak and impoverished physically. When he came forth, however, he was strong in mind, fortified by the Word and Spirit of God, and by the prayer, supplication, and communion with his Heavenly Father that he had experienced. We also must be molded, as Christ was, by the Word and Spirit of God. We must commune with him in prayer at every opportunity. If this thought is fully appreciated, then we have comprehended the means by which we can be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

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