

Ephesians 6:16-17 "Clothed In Christ & Armed With Power"

When we talk about the armor of God, we must understand that it presupposes there is a need for such armor. But we would be missing the point if we thought that this is an additional grace or gift from God.

As we've seen over the last couple of weeks the armor of God is really what is already included in our salvation; what we already possess in Christ. What Christian could deny that he or she already possesses the truth of God's word and His righteousness put to our account by faith in Christ? What Christian could deny that we already have the gospel of peace which we are to give to people? What Christian could deny that we already have a saving faith which also enables us to live in this world to God's glory by faith?

The full armor of God is another way of talking about the all-encompassing salvation we possess and which God wants us to walk in by faith. And this has been Paul's point throughout this letter. In fact, this is the way he started this letter.

EPH 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

These spiritual blessings in Christ are a direct result of the new life we have in Him. It is this new life in Christ which Paul wants us to walk in so that we may not only show the world the One to whom we belong, but also to assure us that we may walk in His strength alone.

This armor is a metaphor, a word picture if you will, of the strength which only God supplies. It is something which the prophet Isaiah associated with God Himself who put this armor on in a way to show that He has the strength to judge and overcome those who would come against Him.

ISA 59:17 "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."

PSA 93:1 "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength...."

We can see that this is the language the Lord uses of Himself. Therefore, His strength is demonstrated as armor. And, as we've seen before, because we are clothed with Christ, we have everything we need to go forth as His soldiers.

A soldier is one who is prepared for battle and the spiritual battle Paul speaks of here in our text has everything to do with real life and the real people in this world who the enemy would keep blind by falsehoods and deception. Our duty is to use those weapons we've been given to help set them free from the bondage of sin.

This bondage is spiritual in nature, and only the Spirit of God can break through the darkness. And yet, He allows us to play a part as we go forth with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.

The faith which God gives us and which enables us to follow Him each day is vital to our ability to walk in this salvation we have in Christ. And yet even this faith is a gift.

EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

Our faith, which Paul describes in Eph.6:16 as a shield, is the same faith he's already spoken of and which is given to us as part of our salvation. This is why we must never think that we must do something to try and put this armor on. It's already on. God simply wants us to walk in it and go forward in His strength.

But why is it referred to as a shield? Well, again any good teacher will always try and use different ways and means to get the point across in a way that will stick with us. It's a picture we can put in our minds and refer to at any time.

The shield Paul refers to here may or may not be a Roman shield. Shields were used of practically every army of the known world at that time. There were small shields and large shields. There were round shields and rectangular shields. But even in the Roman army there were different types of shields for different applications.

Robertson in his Word pictures in the New Testament speaks of two different shields which are described by two different Greek words. There was the *aspis* which was smaller and circular. It was a shield a soldier would use on routine patrol when quick mobility

was important. They might use it for crowd control or to defend themselves from rocks and other flying debris.

But there was another type of shield which, in the Greek, is called *thura*. This word could literally be translated "door". And it's the word we have here in our text when referring to a shield. This shield was in fact very much like a door, at least in appearance. It was about 4 feet by 2 and half feet.

This particular type of shield was used by the Roman infantry in a tactical way when going against other armies. It could actually protect the entire body. It was usually made of wood with leather stretched over it which was reinforced with metal on the top and bottom. (Snodgrass)

This was important because in the event of an attack with flaming arrows the leather would not readily burn. These shields were used for defensive purposes in a unique way. The infantry would close quarters and allow their shields to overlap. They would bend down and allow their shields to act almost as a roof over their entire bodies so that when the arrows came they were protected.

But these shields were not used just defensively. The infantry would use them to advance on the enemy. They would interlock these shields and simply march through the lines of the enemy. This had a dual purpose. Not only did it protect the soldiers from arrows and stones and swords, but it was a very impressive sight to see this huge wall of shields, interlocked as one, marching toward you which gave the appearance of being impregnable. Many armies would flee at this sight.

And so, the point Paul is making by using this imagery is to demonstrate that we have a real, not imagined, defensive and offensive gift from God which enables us to go forward. But, there's a danger here in limiting this gift from God to only a piece of hardware we wear or carry around with us.

The danger is in thinking that we can "protect [ourselves] by [our] power to believe." We touched on this last week. "To speak of faith is not to focus on human belief, but on the faithfulness of God. What protects us from the arrows of the evil one (i.e., any temptation to error or wrong) is our relation with God." (Snodgrass)

We've not been called to be spiritual Rambo's who think we can go toe to toe with the enemy because we now have this armor. No.

The armor is God. And as we follow Him and submit to Him and love Him, we will find our strength in Him together with an ability to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, doing His will.

JAM 4:5-8 "Or do you think Scripture says without reason; that God jealously longs for the spirit that he made to live in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Prov. 3:34) 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you."

James is talking about this full armor of God without using the metaphor that Paul uses in our text. He is simply saying that if we will live for God instead of self, if we will live in the Spirit as opposed to the flesh, we will be walking in God's strength and the attacks of the enemy will be fended off as we are engaged in this spiritual battle.

Why? Because we're fighting according to God's word, His will and His strength. And guess who gets the glory in such battles? God. We're told time and time again in the O.T. where God encourages His people by saying, 'the battle belongs to Me. I will go before you.'

The victory didn't come simply as a result of Israel doing the fighting. The victory came as a result of God promising that He would fight for them. Israel's part was to believe God and then step out on to the battlefield to do battle. In a similar way, we do not fight the enemy by claiming a faith that protects as though faith is a big bubble or an invisible force field no one can get through.

Like Israel, we use faith as we place it in the One who said I will fight for you. You see, it's the object of our faith, not faith in faith, that enables us to go forward. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. You and I believe God and the Son He sent and it is reckoned to us as righteousness; a righteousness which is found only in Christ.

But in a similar way we continue to walk in this salvation as we believe that God is for us, therefore who can be against us? We don't put any assurance in the flesh, we put it in the God who called us out of the darkness of sin and who brought us into the marvelous light and life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What makes faith a shield is knowing that God, in whom we place our faith, shields us and protects us. When the flaming arrows

come; the temptations, the trials, the circumstances in life that would try to be used by the enemy to destroy us, God assures us that we can come to Him and as we submit ourselves to Him the enemy cannot get a foothold and will flee precisely because of the God who defeated him at the cross.

The reason for this is because we are walking away from the enemy and moving toward God. If you're walking away from the flesh and the enemy, it's not a retreat it's an active engagement with the enemy as we rely on the One to whom we are walking toward and whose face we are seeking.

Remember, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb.11:1) But faith is only a vehicle to allow us to know with assurance that the God who gives hope will be faithful to deliver, and though we may not always see this battle with our physical eyes, we have the conviction based on God's truth, that the spiritual war belongs to God and therefore the ultimate victory is seen in the cross of Christ. That's our hope and that should be our conviction, our certainty.

Together with faith in God and His promises we are told to "take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (EPH 6:17)

The idea of "taking" here in our text suggests that someone is extending it for our benefit. It is freely being given. And of course our salvation is just that. However, it was not free to Christ who purchased our salvation with His blood, but He now extends it freely to all who would receive it by faith in Him alone for the forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

Paul uses a similar analogy when describing this helmet of salvation when writing to the Thessalonians.

1TH 5:8 "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

Here, you'll notice that faith is not seen as a shield, but it is seen, together with love, as a breastplate, whereas in our text in chapter 6 righteousness is seen as a breastplate. Part of the reason is that Paul is not making hard and fast rules with the metaphors he uses. He is simply trying to help us see the importance of how these spiritual truths work in our lives like a breastplate or a shield.

This is why we don't want to let the metaphor or word picture get in the way of the truth being taught. And yet, Paul does use the same metaphor in 1Thess.5:8 when speaking of this salvation as being like a helmet.

How is salvation a helmet? Here again, people can use their imaginations to come up with all sorts of ideas. Some have suggested that this is a ceremonial helmet signifying the victory already won, like the kinds of helmets one might wear in a victory parade.

Others have suggested that it protects the most important part of the body from any fatal blow with a sword. The head is also seen as the place where the mind is used to know what the will of God is and to make conscious choices for God.

All of these things may be true. But again, we need to be careful not to let the metaphor determine the meaning of salvation, rather we must allow salvation to determine the meaning of the helmet.

What do we know about salvation? Salvation, in both the Old and New testaments, meant being delivered from something or somebody. This is why Moses could sing of being delivered from Pharaoh's army when being pursued across the Red sea and ultimately seeing God destroy them.

EXO 15:1-3 "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. 2 The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my *salvation*. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3 The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name."

Salvation in this case had to do with being delivered from other people who would have destroyed them. But salvation was also understood, even by O.T. saints, to be a deliverance from God's wrath and a protection from His judgment, resting in His grace.

2CH 6:41 "Now arise, O LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your saints rejoice in your goodness."

PSA 40:10 "I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly."

PSA 51:12-14 "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. 3 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. 14 Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness."

As we can see from these passages, salvation is God's intervention in the lives of people to deliver, protect and watch over. In our text we must keep in mind that Paul's thought has been to walk in a way that honors the Lord, with the understanding that the enemy will try to keep us from that responsibility.

And so, there is a sense in which God protects and delivers from the enemy's assaults. And by giving the image of taking a helmet we are shown that there is a battle which requires us to depend on God's protection.

Paul is saying, in every area of life we must depend on God in the battle. Our salvation comes from the Lord and therefore to put on His helmet is, in a sense, a visible sign of His marking us out as His soldiers whom He has delivered from the enemy's hand, as He enables us to go forward in this deliverance from sin and its power to do battle against the one who is the epitome of sin and death.

The helmet stands high on the head as a reminder that we have a covering in Christ. But of course, you and I don't wake up in the morning and grab a steel helmet and then go out into the world. But, we do have something which marks us out as one's who have been delivered. That mark, that helmet, which is seen as having the crest of our God, is the fruit which comes from the life we have in our Deliverer.

It is not unlike the picture we have of the saints on the new earth in the New Jerusalem as seen in the book of Revelation, where the name of their Savior stands out clearly on the foreheads of His people.

Revelation 22:3-4 ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads.

Like the helmet of salvation, the name of our Savior emblazoned on our foreheads is a metaphor of ownership. And it is this ownership, as He has purchased us with His blood, that enables us to be identified with His salvation which is not in name only but in

the new life we have in Him that demonstrates itself with the fruit of the Spirit who seals us for the day of redemption.

How else will the world know who we are except by the fruit of our lives? And if the fruit of our lives is the fruit of the Spirit then it stands to reason that that fruit will be showing forth the will of our God which is to come against the enemy by actively seeking our God and walking in His ways and will. His will is to take the message of hope to a dying world, and to be conformed into the image of His Son daily.

Well, if we have the helmet of salvation firmly in place by faith in Christ then how do we know what His marching orders are? How do we know that we can go out to meet the enemy on his own territory? Only through the objective written word of God, the sword of the Spirit.

Paul tells us that it is the sword of the Spirit which we are to take up. We must embrace it and use it. Now the question is how do we use the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God? And by the way, the inference here is that the word of God is the word of the Spirit. This is exactly what Peter brings out in his second epistle.

2PE 1:20-21 "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Paul gives us a similar understanding when he wrote to Timothy.

2TI 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The idea of being God-breathed suggests Spirit-breathed. This is also a very clear indication that when we speak of the Spirit of God we are talking about God Himself. The Spirit is no less God than the Father or the Son. His function in our redemption may be different from both the Father and the Son but He is not inferior in any way, otherwise He would cease to be God.

And so, when we speak of the word of God, we are actually speaking of the Word given by God the Holy Spirit. It is this word God gives which Paul speaks of as a sword. In fact, the writer of Hebrews uses a similar comparison.

HEB 4:12 "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."

This sword of the Spirit is not meant to be used by us to kill people or to destroy them. It is meant as a double-edged sword in that it gives the truth of God which shows people to be condemned in their sin and yet it can penetrate even the hardest of hearts as, through the Spirit, it cuts the heart of stone out and replaces it with a heart of flesh which receives the truth with gladness.

In this sense the sword of the Spirit includes not only the revealed word of God, but the Spirit's effecting work through that word. That's partly why the word can be called "living".

That truth is united to the helmet of salvation because that is what it bears witness of. The word of God always points to the God of our salvation and the One who secured this salvation, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What makes it a sword is that it can allow us to meet the enemy on his own turf with complete confidence in the God of that word who says, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' 'Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.' 'If I am for you, who can be against you?'

The list of promises goes on and on. But the point is that God is giving us assurance that we are not in this fight alone. And that assurance must come from the only source of truth, when it comes to our faith, and that is in the inerrant, infallible, inspired word of the living God.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever." This is what the prophet Isaiah wrote in Isa.40:8. He understood that God will not leave us in the dark when it comes to His will. We can know everything God wants us to know concerning Himself and the salvation we have in Christ.

We don't need extra-biblical writings like the Book of Mormon, or the Apocrypha, or any other writings which men have handed down through the generations which they say must better explain or add to the once delivered written word of God.

But we must come back to the question, how do we use the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God?

We don't use it as a secret incantation whereby we quote it and expect that God must now act in a particular way for us as though He were at our beck and call. To simply claim a portion of God's word and expect God to always answer in the affirmative denies the Sovereignty of God and His prerogative to say, no.

'But God, you tell me anything I ask in faith you must fulfill.'
People will quote from John's epistle to arrive at this conclusion.

1JO 5:14-15 "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us -whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him."

But to suggest that God must answer whatever we ask according to the way we expect Him to answer is to place ourselves above God. If this verse in 1John is a blanket statement to ask for anything, even according to God's will, then we prove God to be a liar in the case of Paul.

We touched on this before, but when Paul prayed three times that the thorn in his flesh, delivered by a messenger of Satan be taken away, we must assume that it was God's will that such a prayer be offered up. It is God's will that we come to Him with our requests and when we are being attacked we must flee to him, as Paul did.

And yet God's answer was, 'no, Paul. My grace is sufficient.' Paul prayed according to God's will and yet we see that there was more to God's will than Paul understood.

For example, is it God's will that we pray for our Government leaders and their salvation? Of course. Does that guarantee that our leaders will always do the right thing and then become believers? Sometimes, but certainly not all the time.

We must allow God to be God. But to use His word certainly includes the idea of praying according to His word. But another way in which the word of God is the sword of the Spirit is the way in which it directs our lives.

When tempted in the desert our Lord combated the enemy with the truth of God's word. The enemy tempted our Lord when He was hungry to turn stones into bread. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (MAT 4:4; Deut. 8:3)

The devil then took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and tempted Him to jump, and then mocked our Lord by saying, "it is written", and then proceeded to describe how the angels will come to His aid.

"Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' (MAT 4:7; Deut. 6:16)"

Does Satan flee because Jesus is quoting Scripture? Not at all. He continues as he boldly demands of Jesus to worship him.

MAT 4:10 "Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' (Deut. 6:13)

Some might think that Jesus quoting this last portion of God's word is what inevitably caused Satan to flee. It was certainly part of the equation. But there was more. Jesus simply resisted and would not give in to the temptations.

Our Lord was not just a hearer of the word, He was a doer. He was the incarnate Son of God who relied on the Father and desired to please the Father in everything. So must we. That is where we find our strength in the word. That is how the word is a sword and a weapon in this spiritual battle that enables us to walk with Christ and do His will.

You can quote Scripture all day at the devil, but unless you're willing to resist him, according to Jam.4:7, and then draw close to God, all the Scripture will not help. We need to trust and love and obey our Lord, knowing that He has given everything we need to fight this fight.

You're not alone. You're not forgotten. You're not a child of the devil. You are loved and belong to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Let me take you back to the beginning of this letter and remind you of the strength you have available to walk in this world and in the battles that ensue.

EPH 1:18-21 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and

authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.