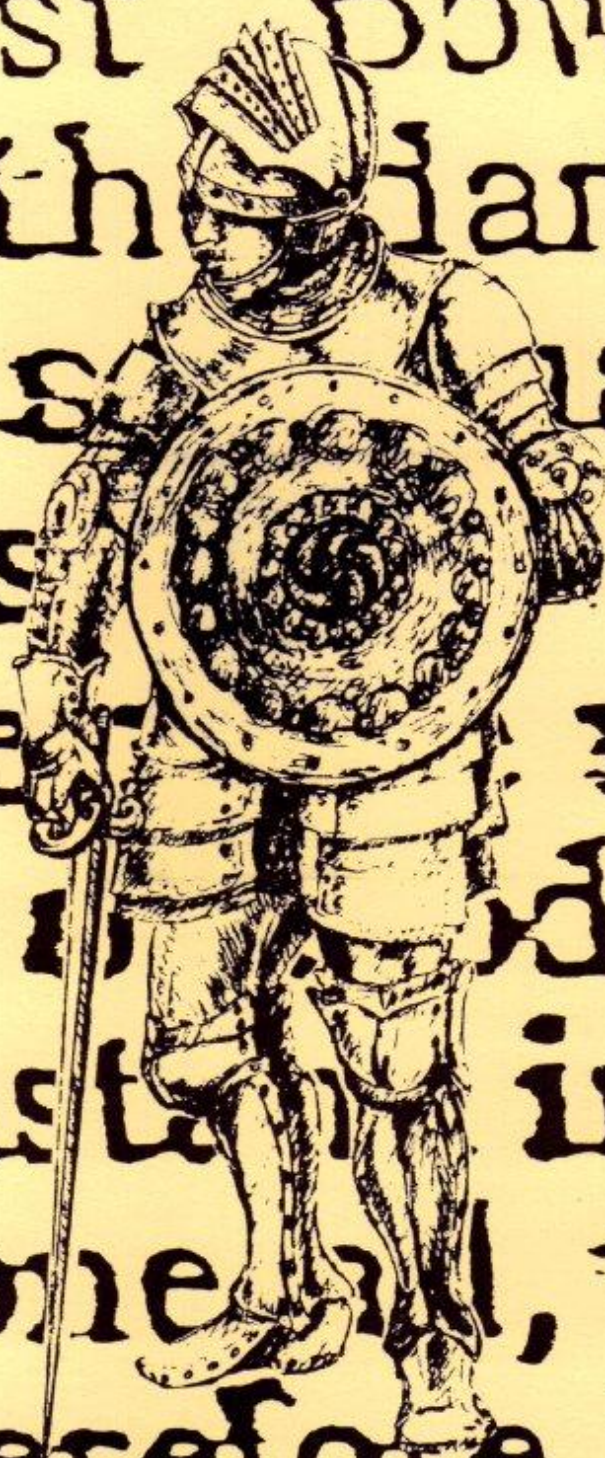


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***THE
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Ephesians 6:10-18

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March 1988

"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. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

— Ephesians 6:10-18

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul has set forth a panoramic view of the unsearchable riches of Christ—the rights and possessions of believers in Christ. Ephesians 1:4 says: "According as He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world..." and again in Ephesians 1:3, "...who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." And in Ephesians 2:5, "...hath quickened us together with Christ." These scriptures prove our position and our wealth in the unseen world. The provision God makes for each believer is just as when He gave Abraham the land of Canaan and said, "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours." (Deut. 11:24) We have to walk on it—stand on it. Not for salvation alone, but for all that He is willing to give us after we are saved.

The Bible declares that a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ is a child of light and has been called and translated into the kingdom of light and is already as good as in that eternal day. But God wants His children to taste of the sweetness that He has made possible to their lives. He wants them to sit at His table like Mephibosheth did at the table of David and He wants them to eat of the bread of life. And, of course, it is Jesus that is the bread of life. God wants us to take to ourselves His armour that we might be able to stand, stand and withstand. Paul said, "... knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel." (Phil. 1:17) Are you willing to defend the gospel?

If we are children of God then we are heirs of God. Words have never been invented that can tell just how wonderful this position is. The Apostle Paul, who was the great revelator of the grace of God, tried to convey what God has given the child of God—unsearchable riches. There is no way we can ever exhaust what Jesus Christ is to our lives. We can become joint heirs with Jesus Christ, but not by being thrown into a mold. We are of the wrought nature of metals which must take shape as we go with God. The cuttings, hammerings, floods, fires, furnaces and the lions' den—these are the things that will prepare us to become joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We can be heirs of God yet lose out on joint heirship with Jesus. We have a worthy foe and he can beat us out of our inheritance. There is only one man that can and already has conquered him and He is on our side. We can be strong in that Man, Christ Jesus, and in the power of His might we can defeat the enemy.

As Paul comes to the word "finally" in the above portion, he is telling us that we have to stand for these riches because there is an enemy who wants to rob us of them all. We don't have to fight for them, we are told in the first chapter of Ephesians that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavens in Christ. Ours is a defensive battle and provisions have been made to fight this enemy if we put on the whole armour of God.

The enemy is the devil and he is manifested in three special ways throughout the Bible. He is manifested as a lion going about seeking whom he may devour. (That time will be especially during the tribulation.) Then the devil is seen as a serpent, subtle and cunning. (It was as the serpent that he deceived Eve.) And then he is seen as an angel of light. There has never been a time when his manifestation as an angel of light has been less challenged than at the present time. There are very few people who will challenge him today. It is just as it was in the book of Judges, "...Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6)

There is only one way that we can be efficient as a good soldier of Jesus Christ and that is to wear God's armour. Only then can we be strong in the Lord. The vast majority of the teaching going out today is to be strong in ourselves. II Corinthians 13:7-9 shows that to be strong in the

Lord is to please God. God gave the Apostle Paul a thorn in the flesh and it was the power of Satan to buffet him from place to place. God just took the fence down like He did in the case of Job and let the devil at Paul. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness..." (II Cor. 12:7) This is just the opposite of what is being advocated today in most Christian churches. We are told to be strong, pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, be what we have got to be. Yet it is in our utter weakness that we lay hold of the strength of the Lord. Not too many people really think they are weak, but if we go with God, He will show us we are nothing and He is everything and without Him we can do nothing. There is as much chance of bearing fruit to glorify God within our own abilities as a branch from a grapevine could bear grapes after being severed from the vine.

Ephesians 6:13 says, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Moffat's translation says, "So take God's armour that ye may be able to make a stand upon the evil day and hold your ground by overcoming all the foe." Weymouth says, "Therefore, put on the complete armour of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the day of battle. And having fought to the end to remain the victors on the field." And Conebear says, "Wherefore take up with you to the battle, the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand them in the evil day. And having overthrown them all to stand unshaken." Saul wanted to give David his armour when he went to meet Goliath, but David wouldn't take it because he hadn't tried it. So he went to Goliath in the name of the Lord of Hosts. (I Sam. 17:45) We can no more defeat the powers of Satan today with organizations and money and our strength than David could have defeated Goliath with Saul's armour and without God.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God so that ye may stand your ground." When Jesus came into our lives, Ephesians 2:6 says that God "...hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. "That is our position now. We don't have to get rich—we already are rich. We don't have to get to heaven — in God's thoughts we are as good as there. We don't have to win eternal life—we are as safe as God is safe. If we want what God wants for us, we have to stand. Stand for what? Stand for the truth. These words stir the blood of believers who are in contact with and value the truth and see its everlasting wealth. Who of us would fight for our home, our loved ones, our friends, our possessions and yet not hear the rousing soldierly counsel of Paul as he passes on to us the revelation that God gave him of the unsearchable riches of Christ that are possible to every believer of this church age? These are the things that are worth giving our lives for.

OUR BATTLE

The natural heritage of Americans is to fight for freedom. America was settled by pilgrims who came here to get away from the dictates of tyrant kings and rulers and to worship God as they believed the word of God instructed them. The Revolutionary War was the breakaway to freedom. There have been four wars in the last seventy-five years in this country and they were all fought for human rights and for freedom. After prayer, the great Constitution was written so that men might be free. The Bill of Rights has certainly been abused, but thank God for it and the Constitution.

There seems to be an awakening of patriotism in this country today but spiritually speaking,

rights have become less and less important to the majority of people. One may even sit in a so-called Fundamental or Pentecostal church for years and never know how to be born again. People are being robbed of the precious things of God either through ignorance or compromise. If the truth of salvation ever grips a heart, there is nothing in this world that can compare to the treasure that is there. To guard the Bill of Rights, the Constitution of the United States or Fort Knox is one thing, but the truth of the Gospel is something that outweighs everything else in the universe. Even God said He honored it above all His name.

The spiritual battle we are in is defensive in nature and the prize we are striving for is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Saving faith has translated us out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God's dear Son, if we are born again. It is faith which contends for what God has promised us. The devil will try to suggest things that we know aren't so. We don't know by the way we feel but by faith, because "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1)

The warfare of the believer is not a desperate thing. It is continuous, never letting up and yet it is glorious because this is how we take hold of our inheritance in Christ. The war is against the organized bands and the wicked, dark and subtle forces that are in this world. It is defensive in nature. Again, we don't have to gain something—we just have to claim something that God has already given us. We need the eyes of our hearts open so we may know what is the hope of our calling and what is the exceeding great riches of His faith unto us which believe. (Eph. 1:19)

God's precious people are making such terrible judgments today. They are selling out to things that will bring only a moment's pleasure. We need to choose the things that are ours forever—things that are ours by divine light. God needs to deepen the heart. Paul prayed in this book of Ephesians that our hearts be filled with all the fullness of God for our lives! We need to put our confidence in Him for He alone will not fail us. We need to know the objective for our lives.

The enemy has subtly deceived many by getting them more occupied with a living than a life. People give themselves almost to the breaking point for a standard of living and allow the everlasting treasures of God to become unimportant. Most would not even part with a friend or a small pleasure for the truth that is in the Bible. To really go with God one must take His cross, for that is where the deepest joy, satisfaction and pleasure that this life affords can be found. The church today is not willing to bear the cross—generally they are not given a cross to bear. Only as the cross is in a life will the beauty and wealth of the Bible become a reality.

The truth is so little known that most of God's children have the idea they are on probation. But Jesus said that any who believe on Him are passed from death unto life. (John 5:24) Although many men are leading people to Christ, they are robbing those people of the eternal treasures of God if they are not teaching them the deeper things of God. This is where we can see the enemy at work. Since these men are leading people to Christ they are unquestioned as to what else they are teaching. What would it matter if we were to lose everything we had in this world if that were the will of God? The devil cannot touch us if God does not permit him to, and if He does permit him to God will work all things for our good. But God's people are not putting up a fight for their eternal treasures. Most children of God never even know their rights or realize how rich they are. We are children on our way home, and we can be jubilant and glad even though we are in a far country. This life is often heavy with awful and unceasing battle and the fire of the enemy, and there can be no victory apart from wearing the whole armour of God and taking the strength that He alone can give. We are told to be strong in the Lord. Regardless of how educated or wealthy

we are, we are helpless when it comes to fighting the battle of the spirit without Jesus Christ. The Lord will keep us in the battle, and all along the way there will be springs of refreshing. Paul said in II Cor. 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." Certainly the enemy will do all that God will allow him to do to darken our vision of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Although we may have missed gracious opportunities in the past, God will still count us faithful and will give us more grace to have His best.

The coliseum in Rome is one of the grandest ruins in the world. It is circular with forty elevations which seat 25,000 spectators. At one time located under its floor were iron cages that held ravenous beasts and as a group of Christians would be brought into the arena those starved beasts would be turned loose on them. These were men and women and children who had at one time or another severed old friendships and fellowships, perhaps of a lifetime, in order to go with God and fight for their wealth in Christ. Today there are many who have been disowned by relatives and loved ones because of their stand for God, but they have never been fed to beasts. We need to recognize, however, that we are confronted with beasts here and now—spiritual beasts that would love to rob us of everything we could one day treasure.

John 10:10 says, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." One of Satan's best strategy's is to rob believers of the best God has for their lives. Many times He does this by getting a believer to settle for God's good, instead of His best. Anything that keeps us from the truth robs us of God's best. The truth is the dearest treasure of time and eternity. Paul, with his God-given vision and revelation of eternal wealth, judged everything that might keep him from God's best as refuse.

The devil uses the world to defeat Christians and most Christians do not realize the deadliness of this world. When Paul expressed the death of the sinner, he said, "... who walked according to the course of this world." (Eph. 2:2) They walked in harmony with the world. We are in the world and God knows we are in the world. We cannot denounce the things of the world such as food, clothing and shelter, but the ways of the world we can denounce. It has come to the place where saints and sinners generally cannot be told apart. Christians act just like the world, seeking their entertainment, pleasure and satisfaction from the world, and it is death to them.

And then there is the alien religion. This is a time when anything goes. Nicodemus was one of the most religious men that ever lived, but Jesus told that brilliant leader, "... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) The Apostle Paul had much to boast about but he realized that his reliance on his talents made him the chief of sinners. (I Tim 1:15) If ever a man carried a light of his own, it was the Apostle Paul, but he found it to be a false light and he found that it was leading his steps into a Christless eternity. We can be religious about many things but nothing will save us apart from being born again. "... There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

It is not flesh and blood that defeats us. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. "Regardless of what anyone does to us, they are not our enemy. If they are God's child, they are our brother. How often do we give back love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, faith and temperance, instead of seeking revenge? The hosts of evil are arrayed against God's precious people. It is going on here and now and Satan is weaving the evil webs to bind us. He is here to rob us of the only wealth

that we can take from this world. Many of us do not realize the extraordinary subtlety of Satan's powers and the traps and devices that he uses to try to rob us of the glorious high calling that we have in Christ Jesus.

God's people are losing the battle of God's purpose in their lives as they feverishly, many times, work in religious ways. There is only one thing that can enable us to work and fight the good fight of faith and that is when we are equipped with God's armour. If we could fight the battle without God's armour, there would be merit in the human life. To know the Word of God, however, is to know that there is absolutely nothing good about the human life. The third chapter of Romans is one of the great catalogs of God's description of the sinner and we find that there is no one that is good. Altogether, men have become unprofitable. Even man's righteousness—self-righteousness—is like filthy rags in the sight of God, and that is about the only kind of righteousness that is being advocated in this day even among God's own precious people.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Ephesians 6:16

Paul recommends the shield of faith as being sufficient to quench ALL the fiery darts of the wicked. To examine Paul's life is to realize the sufficiency of this shield. As we trace his paths we become aware that they didn't wind lazily through shady lanes. His life was never like a garden protected by high fences with guards where no bitter aloes grew, and where no ravenous beasts could tread. No, here was a man who fought with beasts in Ephesus according to his testimony. He seems to have been open to every cruel device of man and Satan to seek to destroy him. Paul was like the three Hebrew children—God didn't keep them out of the furnace, He kept them in the furnace. We have only a glimpse into the outward things in Paul's life as we read II Cor. 4:8-10 and again in II Cor. 11:24-33 he catalogs just some of the experiences he had. Yet this is the man who urges us to take that shield which he carried into battle. Naturally, we ask if possible that a man in his right mind would recommend a shield that allowed all of these things to spend their fury on him.

First, consider the bodily infirmities. Paul was beaten and whipped many times. And then he said he was given a thorn in the flesh he sought the Lord three times to remove and which the Lord would not. Where was the shield? Then think of the exhausting labors. He said he was "in labors oft;" "whereunto I labored more abundantly than they all;" and, "I labor travail for you day and night." This is not the labor of cutting wood or digging ditches. That labor is exhausting physically. Solomon said, "The rest of the laborer is sweet." But the labor Paul speaks of is a labor of travail; a labor that expends the life to the point of sharp pain. It is labor that presses out of man Paul said, beyond strength in so much that we despair of lives. (II Cor. 1:8) It is a labor like the burnt offering that so few of us ever offer to God.

And then we add to Paul's infirmities and labors the many apparent failures. We can almost hear the sobbing wail as the Apostle writes and contemplates the failures of the churches and individuals. Defeat after defeat and disaster after disaster litter the way of this man, and yet Paul exhorts, "Take unto you the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Human reasoning says that if the shield protects from all the fiery darts, then the protected life must be spared the sufferings of a living martyrdom. Paul could not have been fruitful without all of this agitation and neither can we. The shield of faith is not designed to protect us from the

labor of travail, but to carry us through these labors. Only thus comes the birth of maturity of the children of grace.

We want a shield to keep our happy estate, to shield us from sorrow, to guard against loss, against the rupture of our pleasant relations, to keep pain away and so on. In short, we want a shield that keeps us comfortable. If things are otherwise, we are stunned and confused and our thin reasoning is often twisted and broken and it is here that our false emphasis leads us astray. But Paul lived in the heavens and he sought the prize of the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus, and he wanted us to do the same. Circumstances, afflictions and defeats are all in the outer aspects of life, and Paul never called such life. When he spoke of life and its values he spoke of the soul. This is where Paul's success lied, and it is always in harmony with the Bible. His eyes were never on the wealth or poverty of circumstances. He was only fascinated with the wealth and beauty of the soul. So, when he spoke of the shield of faith protecting, he was speaking of its sufficiency to protect us from bitterness and pride and such like. He only took the shield to keep out those things which would defeat the purpose of God in his life.

We live in a terrible world that is possessed of a terrible enemy. Satan is still the god of this world. As Christians, we are only pilgrims and strangers here—we are just passing through. This is not our home. One day we are going to own it all, but right now we are being trained for a throne. A lot of preachers will tell you that if you aren't prosperous and in health you are out of the will of God, and of course, they can't make that add up in the scriptures. Prisons wouldn't stop Paul, hunger wouldn't stop him, nor nakedness or perils. He saw something that was beyond it all and he knew that all things worked together for his good. Paul's shield didn't filter out the loss of things, but it filtered out the pessimism that may have come from the loss of things. Deadly things are born of injuries without the shield of faith. We will know pain, but we must not murmur. We will have disappointments but we must not let them sour us or make us bitter. We may have riches and success but we dare not become materialistic or proud.

The only way we can take the shield of faith is through a vital faith in Christ. To do so, we must seek the Lord and allow His wonderful purpose to seize all the roads that come into our lives. Such a faith puts first things first and it lies in the values of forever. On Paul's list of values are those things of the soul— things eternal.

THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth...”

Ephesians 6:14

Twice we are admonished to put on the whole armour of God and we find it consists of seven inseparable parts. The first is the girdle of truth. Back in Bible days this was the strong belt which held the armour in place. A soldier needed something to hold his sword, shield and spear in place. The Orientals wore long robes that needed to be girded up so they would not get in the way as they ran. A child of God can become distracted in war or peace. Life can become a mess of incoherencies and inconsistencies. Most of God's people don't even know who they are, let alone know anything about fighting the good fight of faith. They don't know what they are after, but God keeps His promises. In the natural, life is bound together in a decisive way or it is indecisive. Jesus set His face as a flint as He went to the cross. Paul said, "...that I may win Him." (Phil. 3:8) We need to bind our life with the truth in order to be consistent—we have to run for the prize with heart and soul.

When one dresses, the belt is put on last, but here it is first. We will never be able to put on the

rest of the armour and do it effectively until we know the truth. The truth is the most important thing in a Christian's life. Paul emphasized to Timothy to stand for the truth. It is the truth that we need. Satan can defeat any of us aside from the truth. He has already got us whipped if we are not following God's plan and purpose for our lives. God's thought for this age is not only to see us saved, but He is visiting the Gentiles in this age to take out of them a people for His name. (Acts 15:14) There is going to be a bride for Christ taken from this dispensation of grace. Out of the church there will come a rib just as God took a rib from the side of Adam to make Eve. God did not use Adam's entire body to make Eve, he only removed a rib while the rest of the body was asleep. Most of God's people are asleep as to what His purpose really is today. If we want to win Christ as our Bridegroom, we must wear the girdle of truth. And so we learn the value of the truth. The devil cannot be defeated apart from the Word of God.

This portion of scripture (Eph. 6:10-18) relates to the finest, most worthy challenge there can be for a life. To own the world could not compare to what we can have. The world's greatest athlete or greatest scholar will amount to nothing when it is all over if they do not go with God. He will not look at the color of our skin or the level of our education—He won't look at anything in the natural. He will only look to see if we girt our life with the girdle of truth. God has given Jesus the name above every name and He wants us to be there to rule and reign with Him. It is God who enables us by giving us His strength and His righteousness. If we let Him have His way, He will take care of every battle.

To know what the truth is for us we must know the Bible meaning of truth. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32) And He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6) And, "When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth..." (John 16:13), speaking of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus prayed to His Father, He said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine..." (John 7:17) God would not leave His people to guess about the truth when it is so important to Him as well as to them.

If a believer is to be victorious he must not slink along like a dog, but walk with the poise and movement of a lion. We need not back away or apologize for having the truth. Only as we know who we are and the purpose to which God has called us and the power and resource with which He backs us are we able to go about positively with assurance and confidence.

There are many faces of truth. Peter spoke of present truth and then there is dispensational truth. In II Timothy 2:15, Paul exhorted Timothy, "...rightly dividing the word of truth." In other words, don't mix it all up. All through the Bible men and women did things according to the word of God. Elijah didn't just go up to Mount Carmel and call the fire down. He said, "...I have done these things at thy word." (I Kings 18:36) If God tells us to do something He will enable us because He backs His word and honors it above all His name. He tried it before He spoke it. It is genuine. It is everything. We can stand on the word of God.

There is such value in this girdle of truth when it comes to sin. Sin is the biggest and yet the most unprofitable business there is in the world today. Every person apart from God is in it. They are serving sin and are slaves to it. There is but one thing that is bigger than sin. Paul said, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (Romans 5:20) There is only one thing that can take sin away and break its power and that is the grace of God. This is the only answer, and in our battle with sin only truth can win.

The value of the girdle can also be found in loneliness and isolation. Just because we feel isolated and lonely does not mean God has forsaken us. The Apostle Paul said, speaking of Jesus, "...who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) No one could love us any more than that. We could be thrown into jail for fifty years and God would be with us every minute. Some of the greatest victories come when everyone but God has forsaken a person. Most of us will wait until we get into a place of pressure before we will seek the Lord. To know the word of God is to have a sense of glorious fellowship along the emptiest and most lonely road. Paul summed it all up in his letter to the Philippians, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19) That is a wonderful thing! "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37) So when our lives are up or down and there are strange comings and goings mingled with joys and sorrows, fair weather or foul weather, we can know "...all things work together for good to them that love God..." (Rom. 8:28) These are the things we can belt ourselves with—the truth.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,
and having on the breastplate of righteousness."

Ephesians 6:14

After we believe and put on the girdle of truth, Paul tells us to put on the breastplate of righteousness. We are accepted by God in the person of Jesus Christ and there is nothing we can do to add to or take away from His righteousness. Jesus was absolutely righteous. So much so that human imagination cannot conceive that He was absolutely holy—sinless from eternity past. He was conceived without sin; He had no sin; He did no sin; and no one could ever condemn Him of sin. He perfectly kept the law; there was no spot in Him. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (I Cor. 5:21) To try to add anything to His righteousness is an insult to God. The most repulsive of sinners can come to God and ask to be saved in Jesus' name and immediately that person becomes as righteous as Jesus Christ Himself. God's grace, love and mercy instantly make that person a new creature as the righteousness of the Holy Saviour blots out forever all that the sinner ever was, ever did or ever will do.

Christ's merit is given to him who has no merit. Christ's obedience to God cancels out all the believer's disobedience. Christ's victory becomes the victory of the defeated. Take it or reject it but that is exactly what the scriptures say and God is not a liar. It should make our hearts ache to see anyone preach any other thing and try to rob God of His glory. Romans 10:9 says: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And Romans 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." This is the gospel and if you embrace, proclaim or support any other gospel than this, the day will come when you will regret it.

So many Christians today are being taught wrong and they are trying to put on an armour of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. This, at its best, could only turn out to be like Adam's armour in the garden. When God made Adam he was as righteous as man can get apart from God, but at the first onslaught of Satan he was ripped apart. Sin has stripped us all down to nothing and only God's righteousness can exalt us.

We must realize that there is a righteousness of doing and not doing that God calls filthy rags. We have the choice of making our own armour of doing or taking God's armour of believing.

When Paul spoke of meeting Christ he said he didn't want to have his own righteousness which was of the law. There is no such thing as having God's righteousness and trying to produce your own. Paul clearly states that it is either God's righteousness or man's righteousness. It is by law or it is by grace. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6) In other words, they are exact opposites. The do and the don't depends on us; the faith depends on God. Which one do you think will stand? How did Israel get out of Egypt? How did they get through the Red Sea? How did they survive forty years in the wilderness and enter the land of Canaan? They did it by God's grace—not by works of righteousness which they could do. Again and again every generation has to learn it for themselves. It was self-righteousness that brought Israel to hate and to kill the Lord Jesus. Today there are millions of God's children caught in this subtle trap of self-righteousness and they are being robbed of God's best.

Whosoever believes and takes Christ as Saviour stands before God forever uncondemned. He is beyond condemnation. The devil cannot condemn him and man cannot condemn him because God has justified him. (Rom. 8:30) While a believer deceived by legality may suffer in this life, God says there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ. (Rom. 8:1) "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. 8:34) Christ is our life and strength and holiness and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—He is our everything. To believe this is to wear the great breastplate of righteousness and we will never fight successfully until we have taken it.

THE SHOES

"And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

Ephesians 6:15

We have already noted that it is God's armour we are to take. We are not told to make an armour, but take the whole armour of God. His is an armour that is tried. David tried it when he went out to face Goliath. Moses tried it when he brought Egypt to its knees and Abraham tried it when he went up on Mount Moriah to offer his son as a sacrifice. This is an armour that will keep an individual's life in any eventuality and we can have it.

If there is no desire for the shoes, then the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness have not yet been put on. We must have on the breastplate and the girdle to wear the shoes. In Bible days shoes were very important to a soldier. He had to march over treacherous roads where traps, sharp sticks, poisonous barbs and hooks obstructed the way. As we must ever defend our position in Christ, the believer should always be taking the gospel to others. The road that leads to the lost can be long and difficult. It can be a road filled with rugged rocks, thorns and other hazards and the devil will use these things to try to discourage us. God will allow him to do this so we may learn to take Him for our needs. Until our strength is gone, until our abilities come to an end, until we realize how much we need God, we are in utter chaos. There is only one way a life will ever count for eternity and that is if God is allowed to season the channels of that life and turn them like rivers withersoever He will. We can get on roads of discouragement and falter and sometimes it seems the road is no road at all, but as long as we are trusting God, we will never err. We have the map that is infallible.

Preparation means: a prepared person; one equal to the opportunity; one who enters the open door with every needed provision for that which is beyond the door. A better translation of this

is: ready. Your feet shod, in other words, with readiness. The readiness of the gospel is like the heat that is born of the sun. The ready person is one whose soul is possessed and inspired of the gospel. The gospel has entered and set the soul free filling it with its glory and love. Only then does it impart to the feet a readiness to take the road leading to the needy.

Sometimes the only thing that can hold us steady is the vision that God puts in our heart. Isaiah 52:7 says: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" To grasp this we have to see and feel the plight of those captives as they sat in Babylon in the shadow of darkness and death, imprisoned and oppressed and longing for freedom. Then over the mountains came messengers bearing the good news of home and freedom! Again, in Isaiah 40:9-11: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!...He shall feed his flock like a shepherd;" If that were true of them, how much more of us? We live in the greatest time man has ever been privileged to live in. God is offering to His people not a land that flows with milk and honey, but He is offering them joint heirship with Jesus Christ and the wonderful privilege to be in that company of whom it will be said one day: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:7)

There are people all around us whose only hope is in the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Disciples of Christ our feet are to be shod with a readiness that is begotten of our own experience of the love and grace of God—readiness to carry the good news over the rough and troubled road and down the highways and byways where men and women live in bondage. Down the road we will find people in many kinds of bondage. Sin feeds on them like a consuming fire and their conscience maybe hardened into unbelief. It matters not if they live in the gutter or in a mansion, for the devil has driven them far away. But are they too far to be reached by the love of God? Does God love them? Is the salvation Christ died to give them sufficient for their estrangement? Such an one may have fainted and doesn't know the way home and they need a good Samaritan who travels that road to show them. There is a multitude perishing where the roads run out at the edge of a pit with no hope. Jesus never could have told the story of the Good Samaritan had there not been a man in the ditch and a Samaritan who would help him. The Bible says that the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. (Prov. 20:27) So many need their lamps lit today, but there can be no new dawning for that person unless someone puts on the shoes of readiness and goes to them.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;"
Ephesians 6:17

The helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit are spoken of together. The sword of the Spirit represents the defensive side of the Christian life while the helmet of salvation represents the offensive side of the Christian life.

Salvation is something that stretches across the years of a Christian life. From the moment one is born of God until the moment they are called home, be it days, weeks, months or years, the helmet of salvation is there. I Thessalonians 5:8 gives us a little further light on this helmet. It says, "...And for an helmet, the hope of salvation." Who of us has not experienced the energy of a mighty hope? It is always a force to be reckoned with in life's journey.

This is a splendid helmet. It covers the head, protecting its thoughts, its visions and its purposes. There is nothing that protects us from fears and compromise and such, as the helmet of hope. Whatever is running through the head today is what will come out of the mouth tomorrow, for out of the heart the mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45) What is the pattern that you are putting in the loom of your life? You will not produce something different from the pattern you are putting in. While men and women have had visions that have given them hope and carried them across the rugged mountains of opposition, there is no vision that we can hope for like the hope of the Bible. You can be the poorest of the poor and the weakest of the weak and still this vision can be yours.

Any student of the Bible must agree that Paul was an optimist. Yet that optimism was never because he closed his eyes to the adversities, but simply because, like Joshua and Caleb, he saw the opposition as it related to the promises of God. While he knew many experiences looked like defeat in the natural, he said, "We know all things work together for good to them that love God..."(Rom. 8:28). This verse will give you hope wherever you are.

Paul was an optimist because he knew of the unutterable love and the grace and the working of God in his life toward a future day and the unsearchable riches that would be his in that day. Men and women make rich livings teaching optimism today, but I challenge anyone to find writings as glowing and radiant with hope as the writings of the Apostle Paul. This was not something he learned in books, but he learned it through years of experience as he walked with God over crooked, dangerous and gloomy pathways. Notice the dark, tragic needs that abound in his writings and in all you will see his head covered with the shining helmet of hope. He said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after..."(Phil. 3:12) He was wearing the helmet of salvation.. The gospel hope ever stretches away to heaven's bliss, so with the helmet we can be optimists, born and sustained by grace and hope. Regardless of the pit that life may put us in, a shining road will stretch before us, for this is the will of God. There is no way we can go astray, if we but trust Him.

Ordinary experience teaches us how much energy there is in a commanding hope. A great hope pours its energy into every faculty of the being. It is just like batteries in a flashlight —they pour their strength into the bulb, and so God pours His strength into us. If we put on the helmet we must believe that whatever things look like, God is going to bring us through. Regardless of what it looks like, He is working it for our good. No matter how long the day, if the vision tarries, wait for it — don't run away! If you lose your hope, you will not go on with God. You have got to realize that in the darkest hour His word is still true.

Notice that Paul is exhorting the Ephesian saints to take the helmet of salvation. Salvation has many facets and the Bible clearly speaks of three tenses of this word. First of all, we are saved. We are as sure of going to heaven the very moment we give our heart to God as we are after walking with Him for fifty years. It is finished—we accepted a finished work! From the day we were saved until the present, our life is being saved. Whatever is done for Christ will last. And one of these days we will be saved. We were saved from the guilt of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and soon, we will be saved from the presence of sin. Salvation stretches across the years of life as it gathers to life the riches of grace and as it sees and embraces the glorious hope of the Gospel. Christianity is more than a step, it is a glorious walk. As Paul wore the helmet in Romans 5:2, he said, "... In hope of the glory of God." Who could ever express the riches of God's glory? He is going to share His glory with us—the glory of the eternal God!

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mr. Great Heart told how he was examining the sword of Valiant for Truth and he said, "It is a right Jerusalem blade." Valiant answered him and said, "Yes, let one have this blade with a hand to wield it and skill to use it and he may venture on an angel." Even Michael the great archangel when withstood by Satan rebuked him in the name of the Lord. (Matt. 4) There is no power apart from God — He is the power. When Satan tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness and told Him to turn the stones to bread, Jesus swung the sword and said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) Twice more He swung the sword and on the third time, Satan withdrew. The devil isn't afraid of our education, organizations, culture or psychology. He isn't afraid of numbers; the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one. The only thing that can turn him away is the sword of the Spirit. Jesus, as God, could have turned those stones to bread, but He was not there to prove that He was God. He came to prove He was a man and as weak as any other man. It was God His Father who made Him strong. When we come to the place where that truth grips our life, we will know what it is to be strong in the Lord.

Even after God had stripped Gideon's army from 32,000 down to 300, their cry was, "The sword of the Lord..." (Judges 7:18) Suddenly the Midianites who were spread in the valley like grasshoppers saw enemies everywhere and went mad and slew one another. The Bible will confuse the devil and can clear us up; we just need to know what it says. Paul knew what sword to take into battle and so did David. While in Abimelech David ate the shew bread and then he asked for a sword. This sword can turn our battlefields into fields of glory.

It is this sword that Paul advised the Ephesian saints to take into battle and never let rust in the scabbard. We are locked in a hand-to-hand battle with the devil and he can always use a blow with the sword of the Spirit. Today's spiritual enemies would attack us every hour of the day and only the sword of the Spirit is sufficient to fight them off. There are falsities and subtleties and evasions and half-truths linked with snatches of truth, and there are exaggerations and compromises of every kind in this present evil world. The devil is upon us as an angel of light and there is but one resource for us today—the sword of the Spirit, a hand to wield it, and the skill to use it. Only thus will we escape the glittering falsities of our times.

When we wield the sword of the Spirit we are wielding God's thoughts, His plan and His purpose. There is nothing that will stop God's plan! To fully grasp the Word as it concerns us, we must know that Paul was given a special revelation for the church and the plan of God and His purpose. When we embrace that revelation, it reveals His will for our lives personally. From the moment He saves us from the deathly consequence of sin He wants to bring us to the unsearchable riches that He has for us in Christ.

So as we go out to the paths of life amid the cold, bristling antagonisms of this world, we must carry the sword of promise. When circumstances mock, whip out the sword of promise. When we appear to be in the minority and the enemy swarms around us like a hive of bees, we can carry the sword of promise. When friends forsake us, we can take the sword. The sword says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Deut. 31:6) When the enemy taunts us because of our weakness, our want of culture, our lack of rank, we can whip out the sword and say, "Now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:1) This is the sword of the Spirit — the word of divine truth.

Like David, we find this sword in the house of bread. It is there in that splendid armory that we find the sword which is the revelation of truth telling us how the great God of the universe thinks. It is in this sword that He tells us how to think amid all the foul doctrines of our day. Here we must find our resources to fight the good fight of faith and finish our course with joy. Only the sword in our hands will bring us through this life victoriously.

PRAYER

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints:"

Ephesians 6:18

Now the warrior is clothed and appears to be ready. His loins are girt with truth, he has on the breastplate of righteousness, his feet are shod ready to carry the gospel, he has the shield of faith, on his head the helmet of salvation, and in his hand the sword of the Spirit. Such armour is all-sufficient because it is God's own armour. There is not a place where the enemy can get through to defeat the person that is covered with this armour. The warrior appears to be ready for any and all combat, but he is not. Though clothed with such perfect armour there remains one indispensable and vital thing, and without it warfare would be impossible.

Prayer is absolutely necessary for strength of soul to wear the armour. We are putting on God's armour and it will work only with His abilities. Prayer is the vital relationship between the soul and its resources to fight the good fight of faith. The praying warrior receives the grace energies of the eternal God for the power to win. Prayer is the holy love, strength and beauty of the triune God flowing into the needs of our lives and filling them with the completeness that only He can fill them with. We don't pray to make God willing to impart—we pray to make ourselves willing to receive what He wants to impart; not to turn a reluctant God to ourselves, but to turn a reluctant self to God. Mainly, prayer is the establishing of communion with God. It is clearing the blocked roads of unbelief so often blocked by our strength—not our weakness. Prayer prepares the way for that which only the Lord can do.

The warrior is exhorted to pray to get the mind of God and to go to battle without it would be a mistake. Prayer will enable us to do anything God wants us to do. Jesus said, "I do always those things of my father." The constant mounting up of a string of prayers will not change God's mind—His mind won't be changed. But as we come to God through prayer we tap the mighty resources of heaven. Prayer keeps the lines open and the soul in touch with the base camp with its needed supplies. In the great Battle of the Bulge, the Germans made one final attempt to cut the allies away from their base of supplies. If they could have succeeded, they would have had the enemy at their mercy. If the devil can close us off from our supplies, he will beat us.

The text then tells us to pray "always." That doesn't mean we need to be on our knees twenty-four hours a day, but our heart needs to be in an attitude of trusting God twenty-four hours a day. Apart from Him we are helpless. If we try to go in our own strength we will end up unhappy and defeated with no joy in our life. It doesn't take long under those conditions for the devil to lead us down any path he wants to. There is only one way to defeat the devil and that is as we trust God. If we love and trust God, He is there working, regardless of what it looks like on the surface.

Finally, we are called to sentinel duty: "Watching thereunto." Watching, the entire army, divinely zealous for everyone, seeking for our brother's welfare the same grace we would want for

ourselves and need in our own lives. For the soldier to be successful, he must pray, not just for himself, but for others. Samuel once said, "...God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you;" (I Sam. 12:23) While as individuals we are victorious or defeated, the warrior, in order to please God, must pray for the welfare of all. The weakness of God's people is that they sometimes abandon someone that the devil has already submerged. It is a sin against God to fail to pray for that saint. We can strengthen our brother in his evil day. The character of the evil may vary. Some are under the enemy's power in one way and some are under his power in another. Thus, we must realize that in God's sight one is just as needy as the other. When God's love and grace control us through prayer, each can assist the other.

Now, the warrior is truly ready for battle. All of this has been done that we might stand against the wiles of the devil. Webster defines stand as follows: to assume a specified position; to remain stationary or unchanged; to be steadfast; to act in resistance. It is God's armour that will enable us to do this and only then will we be able to overcome the devil and attain unto the place that God has for us now and forever.