

## I. Intro

There have been plenty of examples in the news lately of powerful people being destroyed by the forces of evil in their lives. Paul Manafort was convicted of tax fraud, bank fraud, and failure to disclose a foreign bank account. Michael Cohen pleaded guilty to tax evasion, bank fraud and violating campaign finance laws. Rick Gates pleaded guilty to financial fraud and lying to investigators. Michael Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about conversations with the Russian ambassador. Coaches, police chiefs, priests, entertainers, sports figures – when faced with temptation, they were unable to stand. How did they get into such a mess? They should know better! Why did they think they could get away with it?

My concern is in helping us to learn how to defend ourselves from temptations so that we do not slide into that same bottomless pit.

## II. Sin & Temptation

Before you declare, “I would never do that!” remember that sin never starts big. Satan is aware that people cannot be lured immediately by tantalizing temptations, so instead, he starts with small deceptions and faulty reasoning. He whispers into your mind suggestions like:

“You need help paying this one medical bill, and your employer will never notice that little amount. You can pay it back as soon as you get paid again.”

Or “Just putting your hand on her shoulder won’t hurt anything. You’re just being compassionate.”

Or “Why should I report that \$100 winning to the IRS? They take so much of my money already.”

Or “Repeating that confidential prayer request isn’t gossip – I’m just getting someone else to join us in praying for that need.”

Every day we face temptations to gossip, to lie, or cheat, or just be lazy. Some are pressured by supervisors to do things against their beliefs or lose their jobs. Christian young people struggle to maintain godly standards of purity and chastity when “everyone else” is living together or going from one partner to the next.

## III. Ephesians 6

The apostle Paul wrote this letter we call *Ephesians* to the Christian Church in Ephesus to encourage them in how they should live. In chapter six he uses the analogy of a soldier dressing for battle to describe how believers can remain righteous in the face of the temptations and evil all around them.

## IV. Our Terrible Enemy

Paul said, “*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*”

Satan, or the devil, is called the deceiver, the prince of darkness, the father of lies, the tempter, the accuser, the beguiling serpent, the opponent of God. The devil is not just the personification of evil. Jesus treated him as a very real and dangerous enemy. Satan is subtle, attractive and crafty. Scripture describes him as prowling around like a hungry lion seeking whom he can devour. His goal is to turn people against God. The Bible treats spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness as a very real threat, and only spiritual resources can prevail against it.

## V. Our Only Strength

Paul begins by reminding the Christians that they must remain “*Strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*” The strength of the Lord is not the power of positive thinking, or personal will power, or mind over matter, or any of those human-centered philosophies. Our strength comes from abiding in Christ, like a branch that is securely attached to the vine. Our strength comes from relying on the incomparably great power of the God who raised Christ from the dead. And our protection comes from putting on the full armor of God.

## VI. Our Shining Armor

Paul uses the analogy of a full set of armor worn by a Roman soldier going into battle. The armor includes both defensive and offensive parts and protects the soldier from head to foot.

### A. The Belt of Truth

The first piece of armor that the soldier put on over his tunic was the belt, since it helped keep the breastplate in place and carried the sword in its sheath.

The belt of Truth is to be the Christian’s first piece of armor too.

John Montgomery Boice wrote: “*In Christianity truth comes first, then action follows. Without truth, without the doctrines, without the knowledge of who God is, who we are, what we have become in Christ, and what we have been called to do... we really do not know what kind of activity in which to engage, and we will be vulnerable to Satan’s onslaughts and wiles.*”<sup>i</sup>

### B. The Breastplate of Righteousness

The second item to be put on is the breastplate of righteousness. The soldier’s bronze breastplate covered the entire torso, front and back, from the neck to the thighs, and protected the soldier from wounds to his vital organs.

In the same way, righteousness and holiness protect the core of the Christian – the soul and conscience. Righteousness is not something you can develop on your own; true righteousness comes from God, through faith in Christ. This breastplate protects Christians against the accusations and lies of Satan and enables them to live righteously in thought and deed, becoming holy and pure, set apart for God’s purpose and glory.

### C. Boots for the feet

Paul’s next phrase is a bit awkward: “*Have your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*” Roman soldiers wore good strong foot coverings made of leather with heavy studded soles that were tied to the ankles and shins with straps of leather.

The gospel gives firmness, steadfastness, and a sure foundation to those who believe it, the same way good boots give you support and stability on rough ground. Perhaps Paul is urging the Christians to “sleep with your boots on,” in other words be ready to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever God sends them.

### D. The Shield of Faith

After putting on belt, breastplate and boots, the soldier was ready to take up his shield. A typical Roman shield was made from two layers of wood, about 4’ by 2.5’ in size, glued together and covered with linen and hides, and bound with iron. The shield completely covered the soldier’s body. Sometimes enemy warriors would dip their arrows in pitch and set them on fire before shooting them. The blazing arrows would set on fire whatever they hit. But if the shield was soaked in water before battle, then when a blazing arrow hit it, the flame would be extinguished.

Strong solid faith in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ is just as essential in spiritual warfare as a Roman shield is in battle. It is by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that your sins are forgiven, and you are given a new understanding of your worth and value in God’s eyes.

The shield of faith will protect you when Satan tries to disable you by shooting blazing darts and fiery arrows into your head – those negative thoughts of doubt or depression; feelings that you are ugly or stupid or fat or not good enough; thoughts of lust or greed, envy or pride, discontent, or revenge; or temptations to steal or cheat or indulge in internet pornography.

When Satan shoots the flaming arrows of logical atheism, or intellectual blasphemy, or the rationalizing of evil, or the temptation to rebel against God, it is the **Shield of Faith** that will protect you - faith that God can be trusted, and that all of the commands and promises of God in the Bible are true and trustworthy and apply to you.

#### E. The Helmet of Salvation

The Roman helmet was usually made of bronze or iron with leather attachments. It protected the soldier from blows to the head.

The helmet of salvation protects your thoughts from that wicked deceiver and enemy of your soul. It is Satan's minions that are accusing you of being a failure as a Christian; it is the devil's assistants who want you to think that bad things are happening to you because God doesn't love you and Jesus doesn't care about you. Strap on that helmet of salvation and fill your mind with the promises that Christ has redeemed you and will never let you go.

#### F. The Sword of the Spirit

So far, all the pieces of armor mentioned have been defensive. The sixth and final piece of armor, and the only weapon, is "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*" The Bible, the Word of God, is our strongest and only weapon against the lies of Satan. It isn't just a book that *contains* God's Word – *all* of the Bible is God's Word. The Holy Spirit inspired the various authors. Its words are sacred and absolutely trustworthy. It is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.<sup>ii</sup> The Word of the Lord stands forever.

In order to use this weapon against Satan and the forces of evil, it is essential that we memorize the verses and specific teachings of Scripture. You can't use a sword if you leave it hanging in the sheath on your belt, or never practice using it. You can't deflect Satan's attacks if you don't know the Scripture verses by heart and cannot recite them when they are needed.

The story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness<sup>iii</sup> is the perfect example of the use of the "Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." Whatever temptation Satan tried to throw at Jesus, Jesus quoted a Bible verse that defeated Satan's argument.

- *"Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." (Deut 8:3)*
- *Do not put the Lord your God to the test. (Deut 6:16)*
- *Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. (Deut 6:13)*

## VII. Prayer

Finally, Christian soldiers prepare for battle by praying to God at all times of day or night, on all occasions and in all circumstances. We are directed to pray for the saints – meaning all other Christians. Pray that our church will always be true to the teaching of Scripture. Pray that our elders would always be wise and bold, listening to the voice of God directing them to the right path of action. Pray that our pastor will always preach the Word of God. Pray that you will remember to use the spiritual armor of God *every day!*

## VIII. The Battle

The Bible is clear that our battle is not an allegorical struggle between reason and emotions. Nor is it a moral conflict between human impulses for good or evil. We are engaged in a war between the people of God vs Satan and his powers of darkness.

The powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil will try daily to get you to abandon your faith or to not bother with a Christian life style. Atheist intellectuals will try to lead you away from your trust in God's Word.

Therefore, **Put on that Armor of God!**

Buckle on the **belt of truth**, so you will not be deceived.

Put on the **breastplate of righteousness** so that no one can make you fall into sin.

Protect your **footing** by standing on the solid foundation of the **Gospel of Peace**.

Defend your mind by wearing the **Helmet of Salvation**.

Let the **shield of faith** in God and in all His promises extinguish your doubts and fears.

Sharpen your **sword** by immersing yourself in the Bible. Read it cover-to-cover every year and memorize as many verses as you can.

And at all times be Prepared for battle by **praying without ceasing**.

There *will* be battles, and we will be attacked at various times and in different ways, because our enemy the devil is prowling around like a hungry lion looking for someone to devour.

**Stand strong because Christ has promised to keep you safe to the end.<sup>iv</sup>**

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<sup>i</sup> John Montgomery Boice, Ephesians – An expositional commentary, p. 244

<sup>ii</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 4

<sup>iv</sup> John 10:29; 17:15