

An Armour to protect you

It would be an unnerving experience, on the same day as receiving your Driver Licence, to be issued with a crash helmet and fireproof suit. “Really?” you might say, “Is there something that I haven’t been told? I don’t remember needing those things in all the hours of practice and preparation.” You would be quite right in saying so. But the fact is that the road ahead in the Christian life is not straightforward. It is full of many hazards and many ‘dangers, toils, and snares’, and if the destination is to be reached, heaven-issued-protective-gear will prove itself to be necessary and advantageous. The Christian may well be surprised on the day that their Captain presents them with their first suit of armour, but they will have no regret in the midst of their journey to heaven.

Icebreaker



In your work place, do you wear any protective gear? Or for the sports you play, or for your kitchen or back shed endeavours, etc, is there protective clothing that you are wise to wear? Give points to the person whose story includes this line: “I wish I’d worn the protection gear!” Give double points for any scars that are still visible.

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Introduction

When the apostle Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus (Acts 19:17-20), such was the turning to the Lord that many people repented of their sorcery and burned their magic scrolls. 'When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas'..... which is a lot of money.

And yet for these Ephesian Christians, the fight with the devil was only just beginning. Satan resents those who used to worship at his throne suddenly marching under a different banner, and knows how to show his malice and displeasure. But the Lord who now takes responsibility for the care and safety of his new recruits does his job well, and issues his soldiers with many protective powers, including the armour of God.

Question 1

In verse 11, Paul mentions that Christians are engaged in a war with the devil, by which he means not a battle with a bad mood, but an encounter with a real, spiritual, malicious being. In his famous book "The Screwtape Letters", Christian apologist C S Lewis said that Christians need to be careful not to dismiss the existence of the devil, nor to give the devil too much prominence. What does he mean by that?

Case Study 1

Roger is always saying "The devil made me do it." When he's late for work, or when he lets out an expletive, or when he loses his temper with his kids, it's always the same: "It's not me, it's the devil. The devil made me do it." Roger has just tipped over a can of paint at the church working bee, and sure enough – out comes his favourite line. What are some things that could be said to help this still-maturing brother?



Case Study 2

Mary has always been asthmatic, even from her childhood. At a church camp, she felt a bit short of breath, and was about to go back to her cabin to get some Ventolin, when one her friends offered to pray and to 'cast the demon out' forever. If you were Mary, how would you respond to this well-meaning friend?

Question 2

Paul is writing this letter from prison, and in fact, while being chained to a Roman soldier (v20). Do you think this may have influenced his choice to describe the Christian's spiritual warfare in terms of a soldier's armour? Could there be another reason?

Question 3

From verse 14 to 17, Paul lists six pieces of armour:

- The belt of truth*
- The breastplate of righteousness*
- The shoes of gospel peace*
- The shield of faith*
- The helmet of salvation*
- The sword of the Spirit*



The first is the comfort of a truth unchanging (eg infallible truth). The second is the perfect righteousness of Christ, both His obedient life and atoning death. The third is the joy of healing grace that comes through the gospel, which puts us on our feet instead lying in the gutter of sin. The fourth is the exercise of faith in all the promises of God. The fifth is the protection of a salvation that is past, present and future, that is, predestination, justification, and glorification. The sixth is all the holy commands of a holy God from Genesis to Revelation.

In the following paragraph, circle the words that suggest an allusion to the various pieces of armour:

When I fail to do what God wants, I need to repent and look to Jesus and to His perfect righteousness as my sole hope of right standing with God, and then press on again in the ways of godly living. In other words, I must cover my heart with the merits of Christ's righteousness, and hold this hope in place by an appeal to God's truth, even Romans 5:1, and then quickly rise from my self-loathing to recommence the march to heaven, strengthened by grace, and armed with the promise that He will not let me fall.

Question 4

The great English Puritan, Thomas Watson, gave the following helpful observation on the way that Satan sometimes attacks:

If Satan cannot take a Christian away from duty, he will put him on too far in duty. Humiliation is a duty, but Satan suggests that the soul is not humbled enough, and indeed he never thinks it humbled enough till it despairs. Satan comes thus to a man: "Your sins have been great, and your sorrow should be proportionable, but is it so? Can you say you have been as great a mourner as you have been a sinner? What is a drop of sorrow to a sea of sin?" This is laid only as a snare. The subtle enemy would have the Christian weep himself blind, and in a desperate humour [mood] throw away the anchor of hope."

In examining your own Christian walk to this point, can you relate to these words? Have there been times when the devil has tempted you to beat yourself up when you've failed, and then, to rub salt into the wound, pushed you to the conclusion that you are beyond grace? It may be too painful for you to reveal a personal example of this attack, but if you had a personal armour-bearer, what pieces of the armour would they pass you in this situation?

Case Study 3

Trudy has been to Bible College, and said that the 'Armour of God' is to be thought of this way: The belt is one's resolve to be sincere, that is, a truthful person. The breastplate is one's endeavour to be an upstanding citizen. The shoes are one's endeavour to be a peacemaker. The shield is a healthy dose of self-belief. The helmet is a commitment to right thinking. And the sword is one's identification as a spiritual person. What words and phrases in Ephesians 6 might Trudy have missed in her studies?



Question 5

Besides the armour, God has given to his people many powers to help them to stay the course and to live the Christian life. Work carefully (but efficiently) through the following verses:



A guardian angel (Matthew 18:10)

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

A watchful shepherd (1 Peter 5:2)

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

A caring brother/sister (James 5:19)

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

A good conscience (1 Tim 1:19)

Fight the good fight, ¹⁹ holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.

A praying Advocate (Luke 22:32)

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

An indwelling Spirit (1 John 4:4)

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

A gracious providence (1 Cor 10:13)

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Prayer

Re-read Ephesians 6:18, and pray for any Christians (saints) who you know are in need today.



Re-read Ephesians 6:19, and pray for the advance of the gospel, and for missionaries and preachers and teachers (Sunday School, Youth Leaders).

Re-read Ephesians 6:20, and pray for the persecuted church, and for its strengthening, encouragement and empowerment.