

## Opening Words

What are the flaming arrows of the evil one? They are his accusations against us, true or untrue. The evil one is called the accuser of the brethren, and he accuses us before God night and day.

## 197 Eph Holy War in Heavenly Places 5

For his final exhortation, Paul is walking with the believers in Ephesus through the armory of God. As a veteran soldier of numerous conflicts in the spiritual world, he is well acquainted with the weapons God provides to fight this battle successfully. He wants us to know our weapons and he lists six of them for us. We must become familiar with them if we are going to fight well. In our previous episode, we looked at the belt of truth. Today we are going to examine the next four.

We start with the breastplate of righteousness mentioned in Ephesians 6:14. The breastplate that Roman soldiers used covered both the front and the back side of the soldier and all his vital organs. Many times, preachers, including myself, have commented that the breastplate is only for the front and that is one reason why we should stand and face our enemy. If we turn and run, exposing our unprotected back, then we are more vulnerable to attack. This is good counsel. We should not run from battle. We should stand and face our enemy. But, I have learned that the ancient Roman breastplate did wrap around the entire body and the key point of understanding is that it provided protection against the enemy when the enemy surrounds us.

This verse is also a quotation from Isaiah 59:17 which says, “He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.”

This passage in Isaiah helps us to understand three things. First, our God is the original warrior. He promises that he will fight against sin and darkness. And indeed, he has. He fought primarily when he sent the Messiah to bring the gospel of kingdom to the earth, to confront the evil one, and to die on the cross. Our God is a mighty warrior which helps us realize that the battle we are fighting is not our battle. Second, though it is the battle of the Lord, he has enlisted us to wage war with him against the powers in heavenly places. Third, the fact that Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:17 which was originally a verse about God fighting reminds us that we do not fight in our strength, but we fight in the strength of the Lord.

Paul calls the breastplate, the breastplate of righteousness. Why does he equate righteousness with it? First, our breastplate of righteousness reminds us that we stand before God and before the enemy with a justified position in Christ. We are righteous in heaven’s record books because our sins have been wiped away and Christ’s righteous standing has been applied to our account. This is important to remember and keeps us from losing heart. It keeps our vital organs, the inner organs of our heart, so to speak, strong. The enemy likes to attack us by telling us how dreadful we are as sinners. But one way to repel this attack is to remember that we do not stand before God on our merit. We stand before God on the merit of Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness. In 1 Corinthians

1:30 Paul said Christ Jesus is our righteousness and we must remind the enemy that we stand before him first and foremost on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Second, we remember that one definition of God's righteousness is covenant faithfulness. Because God keeps his promises to us, he is considered a faithful covenant partner. As we realize that he keeps his covenant with us and that our covenant is based upon His consistent, righteous character we have great confidence in the battle.

Third, we remember that the Holy Spirit has entered us to change us. He is making us righteous. Christ is the righteous one, but his goal is to make us righteous inside and out. He is changing our behavior and changing our human nature so that we increasingly reflect His image. As we see these changes, it gives us greater confidence in the battle. Brothers and sisters, put on the breastplate of righteousness by remembering that Christ is our righteousness, he is faithful to the covenant, and he is committed to make us righteous like himself. If you keep these truths at the front of your heart, they will form a protective breastplate against the thrusts of the evil one.

Now we move to the footgear. I'm sure you have seen movies or heard about the soldiers in the Revolutionary War, many who had only rags to wear around their feet to protect them against the winter cold and the rough ground on which they fought. How much more effective would they have been if they had had proper footgear. The Roman half-boot was made of leather, the toes were kept free, the soles were studded, and additional leather straps enabled them to be tightened around the ankle and shin. These boots helped them to make long marches and enabled them to stand firm because of the studs on the soles.

Paul identifies these Roman boots with the Gospel of peace and surely what he had in mind was a readiness of heart to march forward with the Gospel. Once again Paul quoted from Isaiah. This time he quotes from Isaiah 52:7 which says, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Isaiah presents a picture of heralds running from city to city in ancient times and giving news of how their country fared in battles on foreign lands. In Isaiah 52, the herald is announcing on Mt. Zion that God has won the victory in Babylon and his people are coming home. They are set free. Paul uses this verse to give us marching orders. We must go from place to place and announce the victory of the kingdom of God. Good footgear enables us to go from place to place, and Paul is saying that our hearts must be prepared to share the Gospel anytime, anyplace, with anyone and to announce the Gospel of peace to them. Remember, our battle is with spiritual forces in heavenly places, but the goal of the battle is to set people free which happens when they respond to our gospel message.

Next, Paul talks about the shield of faith. The Roman shield was the long shield which measured about 47 inches high and 30 inches wide. A Roman soldier could easily crouch behind such a shield. They were made of layers of wood glued together, then covered with linen and leather and strapped together by iron. They would be very effective against arrows and even flaming arrows shot at them. Paul says we can expect such arrows to be shot at us from the evil one and that is why we need a shield to knock them down.

What are the flaming arrows of the evil one? They are his accusations against us, true or untrue. The evil one is called the accuser of the brethren, and he accuses us before God night and day. I believe he also accuses us to others and he accuses us to ourselves. He comes against us and reminds us of our failures and says things like, “you call yourself a Christian? And you have done these things? You are so unworthy.” Even if we have long been forgiven, he will remind us of our failures in the past. You know, Paul mentioned this in his own life. He looked back upon how he took part in the death of Christians, and I am sure that it bothered him, and I am sure that the evil one never failed, at opportune times, to remind him of what he had done. But Paul learned to overcome those accusations. He overcame them by the shield of faith. He learned to talk back to the devil and say, “Yes, it is true, I did those things, but my sins have been covered by the blood of the Lamb. I am forgiven for them. This I believe. This is my faith.”

You and I can do the same. Many times, I have felt so wretched over my failures, and the devil has known how to pour it on with his flaming arrows, but I have learned to have a private worship time where I start praising God for the blood of Christ that has purchased my forgiveness and my right standing with God. I have learned to talk back to the devil and say, “You are right. I did those things, but I am free from them. I have been washed by Jesus Christ, and I stand before him in his righteousness.” Brothers and sisters, when we do that, we are putting up the shield of faith, and it knocks down the accusations that the evil one hurls against us, and he flees from us.

Let’s look now at our fifth weapon. Paul says we must put on the helmet of salvation. Roman helmets were made of bronze or iron. They had to be strong to withstand a blow to the head. They were lined with a spongy material or felt so that a soldier could endure their weight upon the head. Paul identifies the helmet with salvation. In 1 Thessalonians 5 he called it the hope of salvation.

How is this a weapon for us? We must remember that our salvation is in three stages – past, present, and future. We can say accurately that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. When we say we have been saved we are referring to our full and complete forgiveness and our justified standing before God. What Christ did on the cross was complete and nothing more must be done to gain a right standing with God. But God brought us into this relationship with him that he might change us and conform us to his image. The purpose of justification is that the image of God might be restored and reflected in us. This is a daily process, daily change. With this daily change, we can say that we are being saved. And the goal of it all is that one day we might stand before God in perfection with a new body and reign with Christ. We call this glorification, and it is our future salvation. We have been saved – justification. We are being saved – sanctification. We will be saved – glorification.

Paul says, “put this helmet of salvation on and when you do it will give you hope that what God has started he will finish.” I know that we often need hope. Sometimes we go through trials, times of testing, and devilish temptation and we wonder, “will there ever be an end to this?” Paul says, put on hope like a helmet. We look at the world around us and we see so much evil. We see the struggles in the church and wonder, “will righteousness prevail? Will God’s will be done on earth as it is done in heaven?” Paul says, “Do not lose hope. The victory is assured. The Church will prevail. God’s kingdom will supplant the kingdoms of this world.” It’s hard to fight a battle if you have no

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hope that you are going to win. But with the hope of final victory, we can fight on for the cause of Christ in the world.