

The Believer's Armor – Part 5

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul encourages believers to be strong in the Lord, wearing the full armor of God
2. aim – to cause us to stand fast against the temptations and oppositions of the world in full faith
3. passage – Ephesians 6:10-20

b. outline

1. The Believer's Struggle (Ephesians 6:10-13)
2. The Believer's Armor (Ephesians 6:14-17)
3. The Believer's Perseverance (Ephesians 6:18-20)

c. opening

1. the reality of *spiritual warfare*
 - a. **Paul insists that every believer struggles against forces of evil (not comfort), and that this evil is so great that it requires the fullness of God's power over us to combat it and survive**
2. the reality of *divine protection*
 - a. **Paul uses a metaphor of as a picture of God himself, adorned with all of the elements of his own righteousness coming against each force of evil arrayed against him (and us)**
3. the reality of *the armor*
 - a. the "belt" – the essential "girding" of security that sits *at our very core*
 1. the **primary attack**: "has God [really] said?" – attacking the **content** of our faith
 - b. the "breastplate" – the core of Christ's own righteousness *covering our heart*
 1. the **secondary attack**: are you *worthy* to stand before God? – attacking our **position**
 - c. the "shoes" – the gospel of peace with God which gives us *stable footing*
 1. the **additional attack**: are you really *safe* in the sight of God? – attacking our **assurance**
 - d. the "shield" – the armor that protects us from the *arrows of the devil*
 1. the **additional attack**: are you *sure* you know what God *means*? – attacking us with **doubt**
 - e. the "helmet" – the understanding we must have of what it truly means to be saved
 1. the **additional attack**: are you *feeling* good about life? – attacking us with **emotionalism**
 - f. the "sword" – the word of God that clearly makes moral and practical distinctions for us
 1. the **final attack**: is there really any *difference*? – attacking us with **indifference**
4. the reality of *a proper response*
 - a. **note**: it is possible to be fully dressed, but not actually ready to go out and face the enemy
 - b. or (in the soldier analogy), **ready to take orders from headquarters (from the commander)**
 - c. the proper response in this armor is a life of prayer, and it must be:
 1. *constant* – because the battle is constant, we must be in constant appeal to our commander
 2. *Spirit-empowered* – we must be in full submission to the will of the commander
 3. *alert* – having eyes wide open to evil around us, we must be honest with our commander

III. The Believer's Perseverance (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Content

b. prayer in the Spirit (v. 18)

4. it must be **zealous** in its devotion ("with all perseverance")
 - a. "perseverance" = persistence; lit. a persistent effort towards a goal; pressing forward continually
 1. **(strangely)** a Greek word used only here – it does not appear *anywhere else* in the N.T.
 2. **(in fact)** this is the *only* place in the ESV N.T. where a form of the word "persevere" appears
 - a. a number of other synonymous words are used: **e.g.** steadfastness, patience, endurance
 - b. the NASB uses a form of "perseverance" in 21 different verses to translate all of these synonymous words – **i.e.** they combine the various ideas into a single concept
 3. "perseverance" is used here by Paul to mean *more* than just constant (**see above**)
 - a. it may be that Paul chose a very unique word here to make a point – what he is commanding the Christian soldier to do is *far more* than just "be constant" in prayer
 - b. **remember**: his audience would *know* this word – he uses it (in its uniqueness) to make a point to them (**i.e.** to "jar" them in some way)

- b. followers of Christ need to be **zealous** in the pursuit of the grace of God in the face of evil
 - 1. **note:** biblical Christianity is not a “pray it and play it” enterprise – faith in Christ requires joining him in the great conflict against the forces of evil that were loosed in the world at Adam’s fall “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed;*” (**Genesis 3:15**)
 - a. for many, the message of Christianity is about “ease” and “comfort” and “heaven”
 - b. for the biblically minded, the message of Christianity is about entering into a great conflict
 - 1. constant conflict is the result of the rebellion of humanity against its Creator
 - 2. but, for those who choose to align themselves with the Creator, they are now in constant conflict with the forces of evil who are striving to maintain their “hold” on the world
 - 2. thus, the Christian must **zealously** seek the will of God in all things
 - a. **truth: our prayer life (often) reveals how zealous we are for the Lord and his will**
 - b. **truth: the prayer life of a church (typically) reveals how zealous it is for the will of God**
 - c. **the prayer of the Christian soldier is to be zealous for the grace of God – being absolutely committed to seeking the help and mercy and direction of our commander**
5. it must be **ecumenical** in its nature (“for all the saints”)
 - a. ecumenical = across a wide spectrum; representing an array of persons
 - 1. **modern:** representing a wide variety of *organizations* that hold to the “Christian tradition” – **i.e.** ecumenism: bringing together disparate groups (**e.g. Evangelicals and Catholics Together**)
 - 2. **biblical:** representing all who *truly belong* to the faith once delivered to the saints – **i.e.** including the truly elect and regenerate of all generations and geography
 - 3. ecumenical = a habit of prayer for every true believer; a sense in which our prayer life extends from our personal needs to the needs of those around us to the needs of those beyond our direct experience (us → the church → the elect of every tribe, tongue, nation [Pano, Eduardo])
 - a. **note:** the format of Jesus’ prayer in **John 17** is *exactly* in this format:
 - 1. first, he prayed for himself, because his work would result in salvation for the world
 - a. he would need to be in a right relationship *with his Father* to complete his work
 - 2. next, he prayed for the then-living disciples, because they would carry the message out
 - a. they would need to be in a right relationship *with him* to carry his message
 - 3. finally, he prayed for those who would believe (us), because we need unity to finish it
 - a. we need to be in a right relationship *with one another* to finish the work of the gospel
 - b. “*making supplication*” = to pray for; to plead for; to entreat on behalf of another; to earnestly request
 - 1. **question:** *what* does Paul *really* want us to beg from Christ – *what* should we be pleading with God *to do* for us as we pray?
 - a. **reality:** for most Christians, the “furthest” that they ever get is to pray for the physical (or temporal) needs of themselves or others (**e.g. Aunt Martha’s goiter surgery**)
 - 1. sure, there’s always room at the foot of the throne of Christ for temporal needs
 - 2. in fact, GFBC has developed a **Member Care Ministry** specifically for temporal needs
 - b. **but, when the prayer life of the believer (or the church) is characterized by this content, the person (or church) has “forgotten” what really matters to God**
 - 2. **answer:** the “unity” Jesus prays for in **John 17:20-23** (and Paul desires here) is not a *modern ecumenism* or a sense of *physical well-being*, but a *unity* of the type that characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son (**a unity of nature and purpose**)
 - c. **the prayer of the Christian soldier is to be ecumenical in seeking God’s will for the entire body of Christ – in the midst of the battle, having the “back” of other soldiers by bringing their true needs to our commander**
- c. **prayer for Paul (vv. 19-20)**
 - 1. Paul’s prayer request here is quite specific – here’s what he **doesn’t** pray for:
 - a. although languishing under house arrest, he doesn’t ask for prayers of *release* or *freedom*
 - b. although languishing under house arrest, he doesn’t ask for prayers of *condition* or *comfort*
 - c. although languishing under house arrest, he doesn’t ask for prayers of *justice* or *retribution*
 - 2. in fact, Paul’s *actual* prayer request is **one thing** in *three parts*:
 - a. “*that words may be given to me*” = a deeper grasp upon the gospel so that he could articulate the central message of Christ more effectively (and this from the leading N.T. writer!!)
 - b. “*in opening my mouth boldly*” = a courage to actually speak forth the message of the gospel to those he came in contact with directly, or indirectly through his letters and co-workers
 - c. “*that I may declare it boldly, as I ought*” = an ability to be persuasive, using the right kinds of words and arguments that would penetrate the hearts and minds of unbelievers

3. **Paul is so deeply aware of and concerned for the spiritual warfare going on around him (and the church) that he begs fellow believers to put on the full armor of God's power and strength with a deep sense of commitment and focus upon the true will of God through real prayer**
 - a. to put away the "parochial" concerns of this world and "get in the battle"