

Helmet, Sword, Spirit, and Prayer

Review

- Victory in spiritual warfare requires active reliance *on* Christ and responsible action *in* his strength.
- Regarding the “the shield of faith” (v. 16), we noted the following:
 - “Faith” is the God-given persuasion to believe Jesus will keep all of God’s gospel promises to me.
 - Jesus was perfect for us not just in his thoughts, words, and deeds; he was also perfect in his faith.
 - From Eden to today, all temptation is an attempt to destroy our confidence in God’s promises.
 - To “take up the shield” means we shelter not behind our piety, but behind the promises of God.
 - When weak, we remember: even the holes in our faith were paid for by the holes in Christ’s hands.

Helmet, Sword, and Spirit

“...and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” (vv. 17-18)

Doctrine

- **“Salvation”** encompasses all God has done to rescue sinners from the ruin of our own self-worship. As a comprehensive term, it is used in Scripture to refer to all aspects of Christian experience:
 - Fundamentally, it points us to God’s grace, in Christ, intervening upon our sin:
But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2.4-5, 8-9)
 - It may point to God’s grace in our past, to the moment of our conversion and justification:
“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3.4-7)
 - It may point to God’s grace in our present – namely, to our ongoing discipleship and sanctification:
“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1.18)
“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. (2 Cor. 2.15-16)
 - It may point to God’s grace in our future, referring to our destiny and glorification:
Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Rom. 13.11-12)
- God’s salvation is revealed in his word – called **“the sword of the Spirit”** because it is God-breathed:
The sacred writings... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3.15-17)
- **“Praying at all times in the Spirit”**: prayer guided, shaped, helped, and prompted by the Holy Spirit:
 - If the “sword of the Spirit” is God’s word, part of what it means to be “praying... in the Spirit” means to form our prayers in reflection up and response to God’s word (Dan. 9.2-3, Acts 4.24-31).
 - The apostle Paul also assures us that the Holy Spirit helps us when we pray (Rom. 8.26).
 - Since God providentially directs all things (Eph. 1.11), and since we are to pray “at all times,” we can infer that the Holy Spirit may bring events, persons, or things to mind for the purpose of prayer.

Gospel

- Like the “breastplate of righteousness” (v. 14), the “helmet of salvation” is Christ’s own armor: “[The LORD] saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head...” (Isa. 59.16-17)
- Similarly, Revelation describes Christ’s words as a sword: “from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword,” (Rev. 1.16). As we noted previously: when Jesus was tempted by the devil (Mat. 4.1-11), in every case he resisted the devil by quoting and trusting in God’s word!
- As for “praying at all times in the Spirit,” the letter to the Hebrews tells us that our Lord’s life was an ongoing life of prayer: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears...” (Heb. 5.7; cf. Mk. 1.35).

Evil

- Throughout our studies in the armor of God, we should have noted a consistent pattern to the “schemes of the devil,” (v. 11). Can the devil or his minions directly control Christian believers (1 Jn. 4.4, 5.18)?
- What then are the Enemy’s most consistent lines of attack (Jas 1.14, Heb 2.15, Jn. 8.44, Rev. 12.10)?

Armor

- In an earlier letter, Paul tells us to “put on... for a helmet the hope of salvation,” (1 Th. 5.8). This hope is not necessarily limited to our hope for the future, but can also refer to the confidence we gain from what God has already done and is doing now in our lives:

Whether our head piece is that measure of salvation which we have already received (forgiveness, deliverance from Satan’s bondage, and adoption into God’s family) or the confident expectation of full salvation on the last day (including resurrection glory and Christ-likeness in heaven), there is no doubt that God’s saving power is our only defence against the enemy of our souls. Charles Hodge wrote: ‘that which adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence and joy, is the fact that he is saved’ and, we might add, that he knows his salvation will be perfected in the end.¹

- Taking up the “sword of the Spirit” means using God’s gospel promises to withstand spiritual attack:

One thinks of a sword as an offensive weapon, but here it must still be part of the church’s defense to fend off attack in its struggle.... The word of God is the prophetic, Spirit-uttered gospel, by which Christ’s treasured people have been cleansed (5:26; cf. Heb 6:5), which gives the church the most solid ground on which to make its stand... the scriptural word, by which they can turn aside temptations and the attacks of Satan as Jesus did during his time on earth (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-10).²

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. (1 Cor. 10.13-14)
- Yet even this will fail unless we are “praying at all times in the Spirit” (note the 4x “all” in vv. 18-20):

Paul adds prayer (verses 18–20)... because it is to pervade all our spiritual warfare. Equipping ourselves with God’s armour is not a mechanical operation; it is itself an expression of our dependence on God, in other words of prayer. Moreover, it is prayer in the Spirit, prompted and guided by him, just as God’s word is ‘the sword of the Spirit’ which he himself employs. Thus Scripture and prayer belong together as the two chief weapons which the Spirit puts into our hands... “Watch and pray”, Jesus urged. It was failure to obey this order which led the apostles into their disastrous disloyalty; similar failure leads to similar disloyalty today. It is by prayer that we wait on the Lord and renew our strength. Without prayer we are much too feeble and flabby to stand against the might of the forces of evil.³

¹ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 282.

² S.M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2016), 555-556.

³ Stott, *Ephesians*, 283-284.