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### **Adorned and Empowered with the Armor of God Ephesians 6:10-20**

Last week I briefly mentioned the interview, in *New Yorker* magazine, of the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. I noted the shock and dismay expressed by the magazine when they discovered that Scalia believed in a literal, personal Devil. They asked him this question: “Isn’t it terribly frightening to believe in the Devil?” Here is the substance of what Scalia said:

“You’re looking at me as though I’m weird. My God! Are you so out of touch with most of America, most of which believes in the Devil? I mean, Jesus Christ believed in the Devil! It’s in the Gospels! You travel in circles that are so, *so* removed from mainstream America that you are appalled that anybody would believe in the Devil! Most of mankind has believed in the Devil, for all of history. Many more intelligent people than you or me have believed in the Devil.”

I realize that some of you, in the course of your Christian life, may have struggled with the idea of literal, personal spiritual being of unimaginable wickedness called the Devil or Satan. When I first started dating Ann, only a month or so after she was converted, she informed me that she didn’t believe in a literal Devil. She had been raised in a very liberal, mainline denominational church in Tulsa and thought such ideas were ridiculous. I can assure you that it wasn’t long before she came to realize the error of her ways.

If there is a Devil, a fallen angelic being called Satan, who oversees a vast empire of other fallen angels we call demons, and there is, what is he up to? Do we really need to be aware of his existence and activity? Are Christians actually at risk of being adversely influenced by him?

In answer to that question, I would simply refer you to two biblical texts, among dozens and dozens that address this subject. In his first epistle, the apostle John made this remarkable and breathtaking statement:

“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:19).

Observe what is a stark and vivid contrast. Whereas the "whole world" is *in* the evil one, we who are "from God" (v. 19) are *in* God and *in* his son, Jesus Christ (v. 20). The point is that **everyone is in someone!** "John wastes no words and blurs no issues. The uncompromising alternative is stated baldly. Everyone belongs either to 'us' or to the 'world'. Everyone is therefore either 'of God' or 'in the evil one'. There is no third category" (John Stott, 194).

This forever shatters the illusion of *neutrality*, the idea that so-called “good” people who are not Christians are neither for God nor for Satan, are neither in God’s kingdom nor in Satan’s. The fact is, all people, young and old, male and female, belong to one of two kingdoms: the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. If one is not “in Christ” one is “in the power of the devil,” even if there is no visible, sensible awareness of being in the devil’s grip. Thus, ***not to serve God is to serve Satan*** whether one is conscious of it or not.

For John to say that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” is beyond breathtaking. The word “in” points to the idea that the whole world languishes in helpless passivity or lives under the influence, power, and under the authority of Satan. This world is in his grip and subject to his dominion (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 17:15; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-2). When one applies this notion to “the whole world” we discover that it encompasses the financial world, business and industry, the stock market, the banking system, political institutions and parties, entertainment (TV, films, media, radio), sports, education, the family, the home, the neighborhood, civic clubs and social service organizations, and country clubs. John is telling us that ***there is a satanic global influence with which we must reckon.***

The second text makes this truth even more personal. Peter writes this:

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

So what can and what should be done about this by Christians? Are we helpless victims of Satan’s power and purposes for this earth? By no means! May it never be! That is where Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 6 comes into play. Simply put: God has graciously provided for us everything we need to resist and overcome Satan and his demons. In fact, when we employ God’s resources and power we are assured of victory over all Satan’s schemes. This is what we read in the second half of our passage, Ephesians 6:14-17. So let’s turn our attention to the “armor” that God himself has provided for our protection.

### *The Armor of God*

#### 1. ***The Belt of Truth*** (v. 14a)

The "belt" or "girdle" was not simply a strip of cloth around the waist or even a narrow belt to hold up one's pants. It was a leather apron that helped protect the lower part of the body. It had two additional functions: a) it was used to hold the sheath for one's sword, and b) one's tunic would be tucked into it whenever fighting or running (cf. 1 Peter 1:13). In the OT God is described as girded with might (Psalm 65:6) and also as girding the psalmist with strength for battle (Psalm 18:32,39).

What does Paul mean by "truth"? On the one hand, ***Jesus*** is the truth (John 1:14; 14:6; Eph. 4:21; see also Romans 13:14). Thus we pray: “I put on the Lord Jesus Christ; I clothe myself with his character; I am filled with his power; I am committed to pursuing his praise; I cherish, prize, treasure, and adore him above all else.”

But the ***Bible*** is also the truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Successful spiritual warfare begins with the question: “Do I accept the Bible as God’s Word, inspired, infallible, and inerrant, the sole authority for belief and practice?” The vast majority of people who are adversely influenced by the principalities and powers of which Paul speaks suffer precisely because of ignorance of biblical truth.

The apostle Paul also speaks of the ***church*** as the pillar of truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15). The church provides protection, reinforcement of biblical virtues, encouragement, stability, guidance, etc. Paul may also be referring to the essential role of the objective truth of Christian ***doctrine*** (John 17:15-17; 2 Cor. 4:1-2; Eph. 4:14-15). Satan will always flourish in the midst of theological ignorance. “Truth” may also refer to ***truthfulness*** in our speech and behavior; the absence of duplicity, hypocrisy; no lying or deception (Eph. 4:25; 5:9); perhaps also the ideas of faithfulness and loyalty.

There are two areas in particular in which demonic lies are most prevalent and powerful: ***1) lies about God*** (character and attributes); ***2) lies about yourself*** (who you are, your identity and position in Christ, your authority/power). We must fight against Satan’s deceptive ways by standing firmly on the “whole counsel of God” as revealed in Scripture.

#### 2. ***The Breastplate of Righteousness*** (v. 14b)

The "breastplate" (*thoraka* from which we get "thorax") usually extended from the base of the neck to the upper part of the thighs, covering what we would call the abdomen or trunk.

Is this righteousness “objective” or “subjective”? That is to say, ***does Paul have in mind the righteousness of Jesus Christ that has been imputed or reckoned to us when we first trusted in Christ for salvation? Or does he mean the experiential righteousness of godly living, day in and day out?*** Probably both, but with emphasis on the former. By objective righteousness Paul would be referring to the breastplate of our justification, our righteous standing/position through faith in Christ; our legal holiness (Phil. 3:3-8; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:19-24). If the emphasis is on our subjective righteousness the idea would be that the breastplate is our experiential holiness of life, our habitual obedience to all that God has commanded (Eph. 4:24; 5:9).

The reason why the “breastplate of righteousness” is so important is that *one of Satan’s most common and effective strategies is to undermine your faith and create doubt in your heart by reminding you of how wicked you are and of how often you have failed as a Christian*. Our response must always be to say: “No matter how badly I have sinned, God sees me as perfectly righteous in Jesus Christ. His righteousness has been imputed to me.” In essence, you fight Satan’s accusations by throwing back in his face the truth of what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8b-9 –

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:8-9).

### 3. *Shoes of the Gospel* (v. 15)

This is a reference to the half-boot or military sandal worn by the Roman legionary. Hobnails or studs underneath provided stability. There are two possible ways of taking Paul’s imagery.

On the one hand, he may mean that we are to shod/fit our feet with preparation or readiness *for* making known the gospel of peace, i.e., *we are to be prepared and ready to proclaim the glorious gospel of peace* (1 Pt. 3:15; Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:13-15). The gospel is the power of God by which people are set free from Satan’s captivity and tyranny (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 2:1-2; Acts 26:18). See especially Rev. 12:10-11.

But I’m inclined to follow the ESV translation which suggests that our feet are to be fitted with “the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” Thus, it isn’t readiness to proclaim the gospel but *readiness that is produced in us by the gospel*. More specifically, the peace which the gospel produces is to prepare us for Satan’s attacks.

As you know, the word “peace” in the NT can have either of two different points of reference. It may refer to *“peace with God”* in the sense that the enmity between us and him is put away through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 5:1-2; Col. 1:19-22). That is most likely what Paul has in mind. But it could also include *“the peace of God”* or the spiritual calm and tranquility that he imparts to us through the Holy Spirit (Phil. 4:6-7).

Therefore, the reference is either to *the peace in the gospel* which we proclaim or to *the peace of the gospel* which we experience. Paradoxically, it is in the midst of spiritual *warfare* that we are called on to proclaim spiritual *peace*!

What a glorious gospel indeed: it brings peace with God, the end of all hostility and wrath and condemnation, at the same it imparts to us God’s very peace, the joy and rest that is found in the heart of God himself.

### 4. *The Shield of Faith* (v. 16)

The “shield” refers to an oblong device @ 4 ft. long and 2 ft. wide. It was made of two layers of wood glued together and covered first with linen and then with hide. It was then bound on top and bottom with iron. Its purpose was to defend against the incendiary missiles of the enemy, i.e., arrows dipped in pitch, set aflame, and launched.

We are to employ the shield of faith “in all circumstances” or at “all times” or on every occasion when the enemy launches his attack.

What are the “flaming darts of the evil one”? Peter O’Brien believes they depict “in highly metaphorical language, every kind of attack launched by the devil and his hosts against the people of God” (480). I believe Paul’s focus is somewhat more narrow:

- the sudden and unexpected eruption in our mind of vile images and thoughts that shock and surprise us (such that are obviously and undeniably contrary to our most basic desires);
- words and pictures that disgust you and violate your God-given sense of propriety/morality leap into your mind; e.g., blasphemous thoughts about Jesus; revolting images of sexual perversity; suicidal urges; compulsive thoughts of doing horribly violent things to family/friends; unaccountable impulses

to rebel against God, against one's family, against one's church; subtle insinuations against God's character/goodness; false feelings of guilt.

Frequently, people report these things to occur while reading the Bible (not newspapers or magazines), while praying, even while praising God. This aggravates feelings of personal guilt and worthlessness, insofar as such occasions are regarded as spiritual (“What kind of person am I that I would have such thoughts/fantasies at precisely the time I should be loving and worshipping God?”).

**Q:** “How do I know the difference between the fiery missiles of the evil one and the sinful activity of my own flesh?”

**A:** “My own evil desire will probably be all too familiar to me, a predictable pattern I've battled with. The Holy Spirit is also quick to convict me of my own sinfulness. Flaming arrows, on the other hand, come like a shot out of the blue, with a nearly irresistible intensity. With such assaults there is also often confusion and excessive guilt, especially if it was an angry impulse which unleashed its fury on another person” (Tom White, 72).

**Q:** “What is the 'faith' to which Paul refers?”

**A:** There are at least three kinds of Christian faith: 1) *saving faith* (product of the new birth); 2) *sanctifying faith* (the fruit of the Holy Spirit), which comes in two forms: a) our faith/belief in the truth of God's Word (faith in the doctrines of the Bible) and b) faith in the trustworthiness/goodness of God himself; and 3) *supernatural faith* (a spontaneous gift of the Holy Spirit). Paul probably has in mind the second of these: sanctifying faith (1 Pt. 5:8-9; 1 John 5:4). We might also refer to these three expressions of faith as converting faith, continuing faith, and charismatic faith.

But let's keep in mind several things about “faith”. First, faith, in and of itself, does not protect us against Satan. Rather, it is *the object/focus of our faith*: God and his powerful presence in our lives (Prov. 30:5; Ps. 5:12; 2 Sam. 22:3). That being said, it is *we* who extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one through faith. *We* are active. Faith is something *we* do.

Also, faith functions as a shield of protection in several ways. Consider Hebrews 11:24-26 where we are told that it was Moses' faith in the glory of the coming Christ and the rewards of obedience that enabled him to say No to the temptations he encountered in Egypt.

Here is another way that faith functions to extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one. When Satan whispers, “God may have cared about you once before, long ago, but his interest in who you are is gone,” you lift up the shield of faith and say, “*That is impossible!* God is immutable. He cannot change. His concern for me is eternal. What he has promised me he will fulfill.”

Or when Satan whispers, “God doesn't love you anymore; not after you've failed him so many times,” you lift up the shield of faith and say, “*That is impossible!* God's love for me can't cease to exist, for he demonstrated it when he gave his Son to suffer in my place.”

Or again, the shield of faith functions whenever we say to the enemy, “I'm going to believe God when he tells me that there is great gain in godliness and therefore I will not fall prey to your seductive temptations.”

Simply put, the shield of faith functions each time we hold up the truth of the Scriptures under the onslaught of Satan's lies.

##### 5. *The Helmet of Salvation* (v. 17a)

*The principal battleground in spiritual warfare is in the mind.* Thus, we have need for a helmet of protection, a “*spiritual hardhat*” if you will. The helmet of the Roman soldier was made of iron or bronze with a sponge of some sort lining the inside.

The “helmet of salvation” is most likely a reference to *the assurance of our salvation*. Satan knows he can gain a major strategic advantage over us if he can sow the seeds of doubt in our minds concerning our relationship with God. In every instance of serious and sustained demonic attack that I have encountered, the individual was plagued with doubt concerning his/her salvation.

"Such is Satan's envy and enmity against a Christian's joy and comfort, that he cannot but act to the utmost of his strength to keep poor souls in doubt and darkness. Satan knows that assurance is a pearl of such price that will make the soul happy forever; he knows that assurance makes a Christian's wilderness to be a paradise; he knows that assurance begets in Christians the most noble and generous spirits; he knows that assurance is that which will make men strong to do exploits, to shake his tottering kingdom about his ears; and therefore he is very studious and industrious to keep souls off from assurance, as he was to cast Adam out of paradise" (Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, p. 130).

To put on the “helmet of salvation,” therefore, means *to live in the knowledge and assurance of the truth expressed in Romans 8:1, 31-38 and Hebrews 13:5-6*. There is nothing Satan can do to alter or undermine the fact that we are saved. As Paul said in Romans 8,

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

But, what he *can* do is erode our assurance and confidence that we are saved. *Our salvation, our standing with God, does not fluctuate or diminish with our success or failure in spiritual battles. But Satan is determined to convince us that it does.*

See also 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9 in which our “helmet” is the “hope of salvation.” In other words, this assurance of salvation is not simply a confidence *now* that I’m saved *now*, but also a confidence *now* that I *will be* saved later.

#### 6. *The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God* (v. 17b)

The “sword” (*machaira*) refers to the short (12-14 inches) straight sword used in close combat. Another term (*romphaia*) refers to the long sword. Satan not only launches fiery missiles from afar, he also moves in close for hand-to-hand combat!

It has been argued that since the sword is our only offensive weapon, spiritual warfare is largely, if not exclusively, defensive. But the sword was the only offensive weapon a Roman soldier carried! The point of the armor was to prepare a soldier for fighting in battle, in whatever form that battle might be.

*The Spirit is not himself the sword. The Word is the sword.* This sword is “of the Spirit” in the sense that it is the Holy Spirit who gives power both to the written and spoken Word of God. This raises the question: What is the “word” of God in v. 17?

The “word” here does not refer to the “Word” of John 1:1 (the *logos*); i.e., it is not a reference to Jesus Christ. There are two terms in the NT for “word” – (1) *logos*, and (2) *rhema*.

People have often insisted that *logos* always refers to the objective revelation of truth that ultimately became the written word of God (the Bible). *Logos*, therefore, refers to the general, collective body of truth that we have in Scripture. *Rhema*, on the other hand, refers to a specific spoken word, an individual utterance, a declaration or saying. *Logos* = the written Scriptures, whereas *rhema* = the application of the written word to specific situations or circumstances, in accordance with the immediate need of the moment. In sum, the *logos* is the objective, written Word of God, whereas *rhema* is the subjective Word of God that is given for each occasion as we encounter our enemy.

The problem with this is that the two terms are often used interchangeably in the NT. For example, in 1 Peter 1:25 *rhema* is used instead of the expected *logos*. In Revelation 12:10-11 *logos* is used instead of the expected *rhema*.

*Logos* is frequently used with reference to individual, spoken utterances (Matt. 7:24; John 2:22; Eph. 4:29; 5:6; and especially Eph. 6:19). And *rhema* can be used of the collective body of truths that comprise the gospel (Eph. 5:26).

We should always be cautious about drawing theological conclusions based solely on an alleged distinction between terms. Nevertheless, having said that, I do believe Paul is talking about *the spoken word of God* here in v. 17. I have three reasons for this.

(1) There is no escaping the fact that in the majority of cases where *rhema* is used in the NT it has in view individual spoken utterances or sayings.

(2) Satan cannot read our thoughts/minds, hence the need to *speak* aloud our resistance to his efforts. Why do I say this? First of all, no biblical text says he can read our minds. Second, Satan is a creature and therefore has limitations. Satan is not God! Only God is omniscient. Also, such knowledge is portrayed in the Bible as peculiar to God. Knowing the heart/mind/intents/thoughts/motives of a person is an ability or prerogative reserved for God alone (Pss. 139:1-4, 23-24; 26:2; 7:9; Jer. 17:9-10; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:4; Heb. 4:12-13). Finally, if Satan could always read our thoughts or know what was in our hearts there would be no place within us of unassailable communion with God.

(3) We are to wage war and resist the Enemy as Jesus did in Matthew 4, by speaking it aloud (the "word" which Jesus spoke [the *rhema* which proceeds out of God] was Scripture).

In summary, there are three primary ways in which we wield the sword of the Spirit:

- We PROCLAIM the Word (as Jesus did); cf. Rev. 12.
- We PRAY the Word (Eph. 6:18-19; Acts 6:4; John 15:7).
- We PRAISE with the Word (i.e., sing the Scriptures).

#### *Conclusion*

I leave you with this gloriously powerful and comforting truth, found in 1 John 4.

“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Yes, Satan is great, but God is greater! Yes, Satan is powerful, but God is infinitely more powerful! The "he" who is in the Christian would include all three persons of the Triune Godhead: (1) God the Father (1 John 3:20; 4:12-13); (2) God the Son (1 John 2:14; 3:24); and (3) God the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20,27). Note well: John does not say "greater are you" but "greater is *he*".

It isn't you, but *God in you* that brings the assurance of victory.