

# The Armor of God

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With thankfulness to God and appreciation for young people of God, I am happy that I am able to speak to you this evening on the subject which the host society assigned me. The subject assigned to me is: The Armor of God. Our venerable Professor H. C. Hoeksema, has spoken to you on the subject of The Battle of Faith. The battle is spiritual. The enemy is a spiritual foe. We fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Our enemy is Satan, who is that old serpent.

A subtle and deceitful enemy for his name is the "Devil." A powerful enemy he is too. He goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He fights not only subtly and deceitfully but also tenaciously and viciously, for he knows his time is short (Rev. 12:12). Over against this enemy we are to stand. How is that possible? Listen to the Spirit of Christ speaking through the apostle Paul. "Wherefore," the apostle writes, "take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

We are going to treat this subject, "The Armor of God" by considering it from three different viewpoints. First, we will ask, what constitutes that armor? Secondly, we must consider, how do I put on this armor? And finally, we must consider, what is the skillful use of the armor of God?

What constitutes this armor? The apostle Paul when speaking of the armor of God expounds upon that idea by using a figure. The figure is the armor of a Roman soldier. The sight of an armor-clad Roman soldier was common to Paul and his readers in Ephesus. The Roman emperor had his soldiers stationed throughout the Roman empire, which nearly spanned all of the then civilized world. The saints of the apostolic church could, therefore, readily identify with this figure of the apostle Paul.

But we will have to look a little more closely at Paul's figure in order that we may gain a full appreciation of its spiritual reality, which is the armor of God.

The apostle mentions separately various elements of this armor. In Ephesians 6:14-17 he mentions a girdle, a breastplate, special shoes, a shield, helmet and a sword.

The girdle was a leather apron or belt studded with brass which protected the mid-section or the abdominal area of the body. It was strong and yet flexible allowing for quick movement of the body. The breast-plate was of two pieces. It covered the back and chest of the soldier protecting the vital organs of the body, especially the heart. A chance arrow either from the front or back would be deflected by this breastplate. A wound in the arm or leg would not prove fatal as would undoubtedly a wound to the heart. The head was protected by the helmet, which also served as an ornamental mark of distinction, showing to comrade and foe alike under whose banner he fought and to whom he gave allegiance. On his feet the Roman soldier wore a special shoe, i.e., a low half-boot with strong sole and open leather work above. This shoe was a spiked shoe, so that it provided sure footing and allowed for quick movement.

In his left hand the Roman legionary carried a large shield with which he was able to ward off the burning arrows and spear thrusts of the enemy. This shield was approximately four feet long and two feet wide. In his right hand the soldier wielded a sword with which he was to press the attack. This sword was his only offensive weapon. Therefore, if we use our imagination for a moment, we can visualize a Roman legion standing on the battle-field presenting to the

enemy a well armored foe. Holding their shields up in front of them they had a wall of metal for their protection. Such is Paul's figure of the armor of a Roman soldier.

Now we inquire briefly, of what does our spiritual armor consist? Truth is our girdle. The truth of the Word of God as God has revealed Himself to us through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the truth. That truth as a girdle surrounds us. Our spiritual breastplate is righteousness. The believer must put on righteousness as a soldier puts on a breastplate. In Isaiah 59:17 we read that God has put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation. Paul obviously draws upon this text of Isaiah and applies it to the believer. But a question confronts us: What is meant by the term righteousness? Is it forensic, legal righteousness? Or subjective righteousness? Our moral rectitude is hardly sufficient to protect the saint. All our good works, our walk is all polluted with sin and corruption. All our good works (subjective righteousness) are so polluted with sin the imperfect saint is betrayed and made vulnerable by the sin which still remains in us, though it be in us against our will. The basic idea is, therefore, that the saint must have on the breastplate of legal righteousness. A righteousness which is the forgiveness of sins of the past as well as of those of the future. Before God the saint is legally righteous in Christ. God has imputed to the believer the righteousness of Christ. A righteousness which Christ has merited by His suffering and death. Christ satisfied completely the justice of God. Christ removed all our sin and guilt. And God declares us, who by nature are ungodly, righteous! God the judge declares that the believer is legally righteous in Christ. Only that righteousness of Christ, which is ours by faith in Him, cannot be pierced by the sword of the devil. A righteousness which is an impenetrable breastplate.

The saint is to put on his spiritual feet the preparedness which the gospel of peace gives him. It is a gospel of peace for by the gospel is made known to us that God has reconciled us to Himself by His Son. And it is a gospel of peace, because through faith in the Christ of the gospel the believer has the assurance that he is justified before God. In the knowledge that he is reconciled to God by the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the believer, standing in the peace that surpasses all understanding, is abundantly prepared to fight the battle of faith. For a spiritual helmet God has given us the knowledge and the consciousness of our salvation in Christ. Salvation is our helmet; but it can only serve as an helmet when we are consciously certain of our salvation.

Then, finally, our spiritual shield is faith and our sword is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. I want to talk more at length about this shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit a little later. But let me point out that when the apostle describes this armor there are really two elements that stand out. One element is the faith of the believer. The other element is the Word of God. The girdle of truth is the truth of the Scriptures, the Word of God. The shoes of the preparedness of the gospel of peace is again the gospel as it is the Word of God recorded as the Holy Scriptures. The breastplate of righteousness is a righteousness merited for us by Him who is the Word of God in the flesh. And the sword is indeed the Word of God. So we have, therefore, basically two elements; one is the Word of God and the other is the faith of the believer.

All this is the "Armor of God." An armor which God places before us as young people and which he commands us to put on in order that we may stand in the evil day.

Don't overlook the fact that this armor is of God. An armor which God according to his wisdom eternally designed for you and me. God knew with what power, subtlety, and tenaciousness the devil and his hordes would fight us. He designed, therefore, an armor for His people that, though His people would constantly be assaulted by spiritual enemies with deadly

weapons of temptation and deceit, they nevertheless would be protected. Not only did the God of all wisdom design this armor; but he also actually produced it, or brought it to realization, through His suffering Son. It is therefore, God's armor; His truth, His righteousness in Christ freely bestowed. His word and His gospel which is a power unto salvation.

There is not one element of this armor which the believer provides. Even the shield of faith is of God, for faith is the gift of God. The Christian can provide no armor for himself. His good works, his religiosity, his piety, his determination to do the right, are so completely tainted with sin that they cannot serve as a protective armor. The believer must put on the armor of God. It alone gives sure protection.

Now, young people of God, you who are sitting before me, God says to you and me by the Spirit of Christ and through the apostle Paul "Put on the whole armor of God!" You and I must put it on. You and I are to know that we cannot stand without being clad with this spiritual armor of God. If one tries to do without this armor, he will surely be destroyed! No other armor but God's armor will do!

You ask: How do I put on this armor of God? How do I do it? I will answer that question first of all negatively. Let me point out that though you and I must put this armor on, we do not then become coworkers with God in the accomplishment of our salvation. It is not so that our "standing" as Paul commands us to do is a joint project between God and us. It isn't so that God places the armor, so-to-speak, before us on the ground and says: "Now it is up to you to do the rest; I need your help and cooperation; I can't do any more." Nor does God, in the second place, just make of us armor-clad robots to fight on the battlefield of faith. Mechanized and automated robots we are not!

Rather, and now positively, we must understand this command of God to put on His armor this way: God commands us for He deals with us as rational moral creatures who are saved in the way of obedience to His command. In the obedience of faith we put on this armor of God.

But there is another problem. We will walk in the obedience to this command only if we understand our desperate need of this armor of God. If we put our confidence in ourselves, or anywhere else than in Christ, we will claim no need for the armor of God. Only in the consciousness of our spiritual need will we heed this command of God, to put on His armor in order that we may stand in this evil day. We must be conscious of two things to know our spiritual need of this armor. They are the devastating power of the devil, and the weakness of our sinful flesh. Do you experientially know how prone by nature you are to every form of sin? Do you know that the devil has an ally in you — the old man of sin? If you and I know these things of ourselves and about the devil, we will want desperately to have on the armor of God.

But the question still confronts us, how do I put on this armor? How does the armor of God become that which will protect me? The answer is I must put on this armor by faith. By faith, I must, consciously appropriate the whole of the Word of God. To put on the armor of God is an act of faith. Only faith is aware of the need of this armor. The unbeliever cannot put this armor on. Not only is the unbeliever not aware of any need for the armor of God, but he would be uncomfortable in it. To consciously appropriate the whole of the Word of God, putting on the armor, is solely an act of faith. What does that mean to "consciously appropriate the whole Word of God?" To appropriate consciously the whole Word of God means that the Word of God becomes part of you, it runs in your spiritual veins and is the marrow of your bones. Young people have said to me that the Word of God isn't really so very much a part of their life. They don't take the Word of God with them throughout the week, to work with them, to college, and

wherever they may go. The Word of God doesn't live in their mind and heart. It is, rather, just a book in the rack in church and merely the book that Dads reads at the supper table. But wherever one may find the Bible and to whomever it may belong, the Word of God isn't consciously theirs. No wonder then that drugs and fornication and getting drunk on beer and movie-going are for us oftentimes pitfalls into which we frequently fall. You see, without the conscious appropriation of the Word of God, we do not have on the armor of God, which would be a sure defense against every temptation no matter what it might be. Put on therefore the whole armor of God by faith.

We are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. The armor of God was the strength of Christ. Christ, who is the truth, and who was assured that he was well pleasing unto God in the way of obedience, was invincible having consciously appropriated to Himself the Word of God. The Word of God was His sure protection. When the wily devil tempting Him said: "Command these stones to be made bread," Christ answered with the Word of God. "It is written," Christ said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Two more times the Devil came to tempt Jesus. Once the Devil himself quoted even a little scripture in order to make sin look like it was the right. Both times, however, Christ answers the Devil with the Word of God. Then the Devil left Christ and Christ was assured of the final victory. Christ had put on the armor of God which is the Word of God. You and I must emulate the Captain of our salvation! Put on, young Christian, the whole armor of God.

That armor is not only for your protection, but it is also given you in order that by it you may be able to put to rout the enemy. You must make skillful use of this armor of God, especially the sword of the Spirit. You must wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. You must use the Word of God to defend the truth over against every lie. By the Word of God you are to silence the clamorous noise of many present day heretics. Many there are who, as cohorts of Satan, seek to destroy the truth of Scripture. Many imposters, calling themselves the ambassadors of Christ, are tearing to pieces the Scriptures, which are the love letter of Christ to His Bride, the Church. I ask you: how are you going to preserve the truth of the Word of God: defend the truth; silence the heretic — if you have not consciously appropriated the Word of God so that it serves as a sword for you?

I would warn you that you are to make skillful use of that sword of the Spirit. Prepare yourself, therefore, by the faithful study of the Word of God in catechism class and in young people's society. Many so-called Christian youth of apostatizing churches have not learned the truth of the Word of God. They have not the Word and therefore have no sword. Defenseless they are carried away by every wind of doctrine. Let's not allow that to happen to us. Make good use of your opportunities as catechumens and society members.

The skillful use of this armor of God also implies that you will be soldiers of Christ who are watching and praying with all supplication. A believer who has by faith consciously appropriated the Word of God, i.e., has put on the whole armor of God, is one that discerns spiritually. He is alert on the battlefield of faith. There are people in the church who sleepily, without spiritual discernment, play around with the old serpent the Devil through the radio, magazines, T.V. and various social contacts. They allow Satan, the old serpent, to slither and wind himself around their arms and neck. They play with sin. They play with sin! They are not on their guard. The result is that you usually find these people in time strewn along the pathway of life spiritually decapitated — they and their children.

Take warning! Watch and pray! Live the life of prayer. Bring all your needs before God

in order that you may receive of Him the strength, the might of the Lord.

Put on the whole armor of God! Be alert on the battlefield! Praying always!

Then go forth into war as confident soldiers of Christ. Confident you may be, first of all, because God hath given to you an impenetrable armor. Confident you may be, secondly, because the Captain of Salvation, who leads you into battle, is the Lord of Lords, to whom hath been given all power in heaven and on earth!

Put on by faith the whole armor of God!

I thank you.

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