



PROTECTION FOR BELIEVERS

Reading: Ephesians 6: 10 – 20

Put on the full armour of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6.11)

In his letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul writes about the need for the protection of believers, but exactly who do they need protection from? He reminds Christians that their struggle is not against earthly powers but against the demonic hosts of Satan who are always assembled ready to wage spiritual warfare. For this reason it is important to recognise that if Christians are to be triumphant in this battle then they need to dress themselves in spiritual clothing. ***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm*** (Ephesians 6: 12-13).

We need to remember that when Paul wrote this letter, he was addressing a group of Christians who were being marginalised because of their newly found faith in Jesus Christ. Yet they were certainly not a defenceless group, for their defence would be the moral high-ground. Equally, we must always remember that even though we may put on and wear the armour of God, we must not cease praying, for even when armed with virtue, we can never act independently of God. Not only are our own prayers for strength and guidance important in this battle, but the prayers of others for us are even more so. We need to be covered by a cloak of prayer. Paul requests the Ephesians to pray for him in his ministry with the words, ***and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak*** (Ephesians 6:19-20). As we struggle against all our enemies, whether spiritual or, as Paul puts it, 'of the flesh', then we are protected by God's armour, and prayer is the most effective weapon of all that we have on our side. Prayer will defeat all enemies in the end because through prayer we align ourselves firmly with God and His righteousness.

In this letter Paul has described the Christian's possessions in Christ in Chapter 1, reminding Christians that they have been blessed with ***every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*** (1:3); reminded them in chapters 2 and 3 that they are ***fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*** (3.6); and also that their purpose in Christ is to have a walk that is worthy of the holy calling to serve God in Christ's name, confirming the call of the Great Commission to every Christian to share the gospel.

Chapter 6 is an exhortation to the Christian to be strong in the Lord, and to clothe themselves with all that God offers to afford them protection whilst about His work, and which will allow them to stand strong in their task without fear.



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The source of this strength is external, coming not from us but from the Lord. Note that Paul says... ***be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might (6.1).*** Thus Paul states that there is both strength and power available for the Christian to call upon, far in excess of their own. He reiterates this in his letter to the Philippians, ***So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*** (Phil. 2: 12-13). The strength comes from wearing the full armour that God supplies; armour that we have to put on, rather than anything that is of ourselves. The main point is that we are not left to defend ourselves with our own relatively feeble strength, but rather we can put on a divine strength which will afford us protection in the spiritual battles we must face.

Paul speaks of the 'schemes of the devil', and we must learn to recognise the various sunning deceits that Satan will use to turn us from the way of Christ. The most easily recognised of these will be things designed to entice people to indulge in wrong desires of the flesh and of the mind.

In November 2003 a survey in America produced some surprising results to ten questions on morality. For example, on the subject of abortion, 33% of people who claimed to be born-again Christians had no moral problem with abortion whilst the same attitude was claimed by just 4% of evangelicals. Similarly, 35% of the former had no moral objection to a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex who was not their spouse, whilst the figure for evangelicals was just 7%. When it came to illicit desires of the mind, 49% of people claiming to be born-again Christians enjoyed sexually fantasising about someone with 15% of evangelicals also having no moral problem with such behaviour.

People may be blinded by false doctrine, and there's certainly much of that around today with the various ideas and thoughts put forward by liberal theologians. Scripture is attacked constantly by these people who all subscribe to their own thinking rather than God's teaching.

People who try their best to live Christian lives are often persecuted for trying to do the right thing. We can only overcome these things with the Lord's help.

Our enemies are many. Principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, all are enemies that have set themselves against us, doing their best to turn us away from God. Paul writes to Timothy of demonic influences, ***But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own con***



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science as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth (1 Timothy 4: 1-3).

Even though we may not fully understand the forces that are assembled against us, nevertheless we can clearly see the need for us to utilise the strength that God provides us with in order to stand firm against such forces.

The armour that God provides is impressive! There is the belt of TRUTH which will free us from sin and maintain our lives with a sense of purpose and direction; the breastplate of RIGHTEOUSNESS which will guide us to that which is good and right in God's eyes; and the GOSPEL OF PEACE for our feet, which enables us to take the Gospel, which is God's power unto salvation, to others. In addition we have the SHIELD OF FAITH which will protect us from the flaming missiles thrown at us by Satan; the HELMET OF SALVATION, which is the gift that bestows and maintains hope; the WORD OF GOD which is the SWORD of the Spirit — the one offensive weapon in our arsenal. With this sword the Spirit can cut through to the heart those to whom we share the gospel message. Finally, and most important, we have PRAYER, the sort of watchful prayer that is tremendously effective when we persevere in prayer. Jesus taught that we must watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation, pointing out that though the Spirit may be willing, nevertheless the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41). Once we equip ourselves with the full armour then we are ***strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*** (Eph. 6:10).

With such powerful strength we are able to resist and stand firm against the powers of darkness, but the choice remains ours as to whether or not we use the protective armour that God makes available to us.

Amen