



## Building an Unyielding Defense

*“Stand there, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation...”*

Ephesians 6:14-17a

I once heard a story about a farmer who responded to watermelon thieves by putting a sign in his field that said: “Warning: One of these melons has been poisoned.” For a few days, he thought his idea had worked: no more watermelons were stolen. Then, one day, he discovered that the sign had been altered to read: “Warning: Two of these melons have been poisoned.” The farmer had to destroy his entire crop, since he didn’t know which other melon was poisoned.

The devil works in similar ways. No matter what sign you put up, he changes it, and comes up with something to confuse. He is a master manipulator and deceiver. How shall we ever fight against him successfully?

The eighteenth-century Scottish divine Ralph Erskine said the only choice we have in responding to Satan is *“flight or fight.”* In light of that, the Christian soldier uses three major strategies to fight against Satan. The first we might call *strategic retreat*, or running for shelter to Christ. As Christian soldiers, we lean on the power of Christ’s might, for we have no shelter from Satan but in Christ (Ps. 57:1).

Having learned where to find refuge in the evil day, we then use the second strategy of our military training, an *unyielding defense*. Much of Paul’s famous spiritual warfare passage in Ephesians 6:10-18 describes this strategy against Satan. We stand, fight, conquer, and drive Satan out in the strength of God’s armor.

The third strategy is an *attacking offense*. In Ephesians 6:14-18, Paul describes the five pieces of armor that we use defensively against Satan, then three ways to offensively fight him.

*“Put on the whole armor of God”* (Eph. 6:11), Paul tells us. Partial equipment will not suffice; twice we are told to put on the *“whole armor”* (vv. 11a, 13a). We put on God by putting on His armor. Christ Himself wore and made the armor, and the Holy Spirit fits it to us and makes it ours. We must fight through to the end until we hold the field against Satan; then we must go on the offense, attacking him. Let’s begin by considering the first two pieces of armor that Paul counsels us to use, gleaned practical lessons for fighting Satan today.

### **The Belt of Truth**

*“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,”* Paul says in Ephesians 6:14. In Bible times, the girdle or belt, in physical warfare, was fastened or buckled at the waist around the short tunic worn by the soldier. The belt supported the “loins” or muscles of the lower back and served as a foundation for much of his remaining armor. Both the breastplate and sword were attached to it. Thus, “girt loins” symbolized readiness to do battle.

Loins girt with truth are a symbol of the Christian binding to himself the Christian faith revealed in the Bible. The Bible is our objective standard of truth and our final authority for doctrine and life. The Bible speaks of loins of the mind rather than loins of the heart (1 Pet. 1:13) because, before

truth can get to the heart, it must pass through the mind. So, if you would fend off Satan, you must first fill your mind with truth.

Truth in the mind is not sufficient, however. We must also possess knowledge of the truth in the heart, our inmost being. If we are going to fight the devil successfully, not only must we master the truth, but the truth must master us.

Apart from God, Satan may be the most powerful mind in the universe. Human wisdom and reason is not sufficient to withstand Satan. But God's truth, as recorded in His Word and personified in His Son, is more than sufficient to fight Satan.

We need truth to battle Satan. Without it, we will be *"tossed to and fro"* with all kinds of doctrine. Many people today are ruled by their feelings. Despising the very theology they need, they are *"carried about with every wind of doctrine"* (Eph. 4:14). Don't be tossed about with your emotions. Ground yourself in truth. Proverbs 23:23 teaches, *"Buy the truth and sell it not."* Or, as Thomas Brooks says in *Precious Remedies*, *"A man may lawfully sell his house, land and jewels, but truth is a jewel that exceeds all price, and must not be sold"* (p. 21).

Jesus said, *"If ye continue in my word, ye shall be my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:31-32). We find freedom in Christ and in His truth. Demons can attack us, but they cannot overcome us if we are grounded in Christ and in His truth. The power of the resurrected Christ is greater than the power of Satan. Satan has no effective weapons against truth; he may rave against you and send numerous demons to hound you, but if you trust in Christ as the Truth of God, you will stand firm because your feet are planted on the Rock that cannot be moved.

Satan's first great weakness is that he is planted in a lie, and, ultimately, a lie cannot stand against truth. Truth will triumph in the end. Cling to the truth. Know the truth, love the truth, and live the truth. Abide in Christ who is Truth, and you will gain the victory over Satan.

## **The Breastplate of Righteousness**

The second piece of armor is the *"breastplate of righteousness"* (6:14). In Paul's day, soldiers wore a protective breastplate made of metal or very tough leather. The breastplate covered the chest and the abdomen, protecting vital organs from swords and other weapons. The breastplate was a critical defense against mortal and lesser wounds.

People in Paul's day believed that organs such as the heart and the liver were the center of affections. Emotions, such as joy or anger, originated in these organs. The apostle Paul used this understanding to teach important spiritual lessons. He said believers must put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect the vital parts of the inner man and its faculties against the attacks of Satan. In their conflict with the invisible powers, believers are most vulnerable in their feelings and emotions. They need strong protection — a breastplate of righteousness — to keep from being wounded in their feelings and emotions.

The righteousness signified by the breastplate is provided by God in Christ. Christ earned that righteousness through His passive and active obedience. In passive obedience, Christ satisfied God's penal justice by fully paying the penalty of sin through His sufferings and death. In active obedience, He satisfied God's perfect demand that His holy law be kept flawlessly in order to merit eternal life. Only this combination of passive and active obedience was sufficient to fully satisfy God's justice. All other forms of righteousness are worthless.

Since no mere man can perform either aspect of this righteousness (who can pay the eternal price of death and hell, and who can keep the law perfectly?), every sinner must depend on Christ to perform it for him. Christ can do this as a substitute for sinners, since He is also God. Being God, infinite value is attached to Christ's sufferings and His obedience to the law. Each one of us urgently and desperately needs to receive Christ's righteousness by Spirit-worked faith, for if we

have this righteousness, we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. If we lack this righteousness, we will perish in our sins.

Paul said that his great goal in life was to win Christ, *“and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God which is by faith”* (Phil. 3:9). Paul says, as it were, *“Everything else is dung, garbage. I used to be proud of my zeal and obedience. They were my breastplate; I relied on my own righteousness. But that is altogether different now.”* Now, as the hymn says,

*“My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”*

Have you learned to see your own righteousness as the filthy rags that Isaiah speaks of (64:6)? Are you clothed instead with the white-robed righteousness of Jesus Christ?

Satan schemes to keep us from resting in Christ’s righteousness. He tries to get us to base our hope for salvation on our feelings. Then, when our feelings dissipate and grow lukewarm, Satan whispers: “You are not a child of God — otherwise you wouldn’t feel this way.”

It is easy to give way to Satan’s suggestion to rely on our feelings, for feelings are an important part of true religion. True religion is more than notion; it also involves a person’s will and emotions. We cannot be saved without feelings, but Satan exaggerates their importance. The righteousness of Christ is our protection against relying too much on feelings. As the hymn says:

*I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly lean on Jesus’ Name.  
On Christ, the solid rock I stand.  
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Feelings are not the foundation of our salvation. Faith comes first. Feelings are the fruit of faith in Christ’s righteousness. We must learn to cast ourselves on what Christ has done, and if we may do that by the grace of God, then we will experience feelings of joy and peace. We must not believe Satan’s lie that faith is spun out of the web of our feelings. That is a dangerous, soul-damning, and hopeless task.

## **Shod Feet**

In verse 15, Paul tells us about the third piece of Christian armor: *“feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”* A good soldier needs proper footwear. The Roman soldiers, with whom Paul was well acquainted, wore sandals with strong straps. The sandals were thickly studded with sharp nails, which kept soldiers from slipping. Footwear was critical for fighting. The soldiers of Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great won many battles partly because of military shoes that prepared them for battle and allowed them to cover long distances in a short time, catching their enemies off guard.

Paul says that Christians must have the right footwear for battling against Satan, and this footwear is *“the preparation of the gospel of peace.”* Christians must always be ready and prepared to do battle with the forces of Satan. Without the right footwear, a Christian will slip and slide to defeat. If a Christian enters the battle half-heartedly, not quite sure if it’s worth the effort, he is already defeated. A believer must always be ready to fight and willing to endure hardship in the battle. A true soldier of Christ knows that the battle against Satan will be tough.

The gospel of peace is the pair of sandals with studs that enables the Christian to put his feet down and stand firm in battle. Like Luther, the Christian says, *“Here I stand,”* or like Paul, he says, *“Stand fast in the faith”* (1 Cor. 16:13).

The best way to stand up to the devil is to have the clearest possible understanding of the gospel and to experience gospel peace that passes all understanding through the blood of Christ. Our identity, comfort, and stability depend on knowing the gospel intellectually and experientially. Then

you can look Satan in the eye, and say, *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* You can say with assurance that *“the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly”* (Rom. 16:20).

## **The Shield of Faith**

The fourth piece of armor is the shield of faith. Paul says this shield enables the believer to *“quench all the fiery darts of the wicked”* (v. 16). Roman shields in Paul’s day were about four feet long by two feet wide, large enough to cover most of the body. They had fireproof metal coverings, which was important to minimize the effect of flaming arrows. With this shield, a soldier could not only stop fiery darts and flaming arrows, but also extinguish them.

Satan’s devices are like fiery darts and flaming arrows. Satan has thousands of ways to attack believers with his darts, including blasphemous thoughts about God, sinful suggestions, and corrupt desires. He shoots darts outwardly at believers as well as inwardly at their hearts and minds. We need the shield of faith to withstand Satan’s assaults for these reasons:

1. Faith helps us recognize satanic devices. William Gurnall said, *“Faith looks behind the curtain of sense, and sees sin before it is dressed up for the stage.”* Faith sees the ugliness and hellishness of sin without its camouflage.
2. Faith puts Christ between Satan and us. Christ’s blood is the fireproof covering on our shield of faith. Christ’s blood and righteousness intervene between Satan and us, guarding us against Satan’s fiery attacks.

Our biggest problem in battling Satan is that we forget to hold up the shield of faith. If you’re a believer, raise high the shield of faith. Hide behind Christ. He will take the blows of Satan for you. He has already warded off every fiery dart to be your perfect Savior. Trust Him. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Satan’s goal is to push aside your shield, then stab you under your armor. Do not let him do that. Take good care of your shield by living in faith. Rest in the person of Christ — come, hear, see, trust, take, know, embrace, rejoice, love, triumph in Christ. By faith, lay hold of Christ, surrendering every part of yourself. Cling to Him the way the prongs of a ring cling to its diamond. Rely on His promises. Faith honors Christ, makes us strong, comforts us, makes us useful, and guarantees Satan’s defeat.

It is said, *“No battle was ever planned by hell’s most gifted strategist which can conquer faith. All its inflamed and terrible darts fall harmless as they strike against the shield of faith.”*

Failing to use faith as a shield — that is, walking in unbelief — is sure to be dangerous, if not fatal. Unbelief dishonors us, weakens us, destroys our comfort, and prevents our usefulness. Deny your doubts; quench your questionings. Refuse to surrender to your daily lusts. Battle Satan with the shield of faith. Trust in the Lord at all times. Remember, a faith that never withstands hell’s temptations will not take you to heaven’s rewards.

## **The Helmet of Salvation**

*“And take the helmet of salvation”* (6:17a). The helmet of salvation is a critical piece of armor. No matter how well a soldier’s body is protected, if his head is left uncovered, his chance of survival is minimal. A soldier must wear his helmet.

When an enemy is spotted in battle, soldiers are ordered to take their battle stations. The first thing a soldier does after positioning himself behind a gun is put his steel helmet on for protection from enemy shells or shrapnel.

The Roman helmet of Paul’s day was a leather cap covered with plates of metal. It was adorned with a kind of ornamental crest or plume. First Thessalonians 5:8 tells us that this helmet is *“the hope of salvation.”*

Discouragement is a common ploy of Satan. Satan wants Christians to think that they have been battling Satan for a very long time and that they have made very little headway in the fight. They stumble into sin every day to the point where there seems to be little point in going on. "My struggle against sin is useless," they tell themselves. "My attempt to live a holy life is hopeless. It is of no use to serve God."

Satan digs in, tempting believers to become deserters in Christ's army. The only answer for this fiery dart is our hope of future salvation, or, as Romans 8 tells us, our "hope of glory." Salvation in the past is justification, salvation in the present is sanctification, and salvation in the future is glorification. Glorification is what Paul has in mind here.

When Satan makes you feel like giving up in the battle against sin, put on your helmet of hope, Paul says. Believe that you have been saved, you are being saved, and you shall be saved. Cling to your only hope, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:1), who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. By His resurrection, you are newly born to a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3-4) and will abundantly increase in hope through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

One object of this abounding hope is the ultimate blessedness of God's kingdom (Acts 2:26; Tit. 1:2). Hope produces joyful confidence in God (Rom. 8:28), patience in tribulation (Rom. 5:3), and perseverance in prayer. It anticipates actual righteousness (Gal. 5:5) and is thus good, blessed, and glorious (2 Thess. 2:16; Tit. 2:13; Col. 1:27). It anchors the soul by linking it to God's steadfastness in Christ (Heb. 3:6; 6:18-19).

If you are a Christian, you have a wonderful future. Your salvation cannot be taken from you. So look to the future. Look to glory, and do not lose heart.

In Romans 8:29-30, which describes the process of salvation from eternity past to eternity future, Paul speaks of glorification in the past tense: "*For whom he did foreknow ... them he also glorified.*" Paul speaks of the future event of heavenly glorification as if it has already happened because his hope for the future is inseparably tied with what God has done for him in the past. The chain of salvation cannot be broken. Every link is anchored in God's eternal, predestinating love. Predestination, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification are all linked together.

Dear believer, be of good hope. No one can pluck you from the Father's hand, nor from Christ's hand (John 10:28-29). The Savior who persevered for you in the thick of battle will give you hope to stay the course in His strength. By wearing the helmet of hope, you will be prepared for every battle with Satan. Christ will sustain you in the fight and will bring you victory. When you see the enemy Satan coming, run to your battle station and put on the helmet of hope. That is the only way to survive.

Lift up your head; let hope be your ornament, your plume of eternal victory. The coming of the Son of man draws near. Soon you will no longer need your helmet. Your battle will be over. Satan will be eternally crushed. You will reign with the Captain of your salvation. You will come out of the great tribulation, wearing robes made white in Christ's blood. You will stand before the throne of God, praising the Lamb of God. The Lamb will lead you to living fountains of water; you will forever bask in His smile, bathe in His glory, and feast in His presence. You will find communing with Christ to be the essence of heaven. You will eternally rejoice in knowing, seeing, loving, praising, and glorifying Him.

Do you hope in Jesus Christ? Everyone hopes in something; we cannot live without hope. But do you have the sure hope of the true Christian? Are you abounding in hope? Do you think often of the hope of heaven? You will fight Satan feebly if you view heaven dimly. But if hope is your helmet, you will be protected against blows to your head. You will withstand the crushing discouragement of the evil one.

