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**Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

**(Ephesians 6:14–17)**

## Introduction

The third stanza of the well-known hymn of a past generation summarises the theme of this passage very well:

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,  
stand in his strength alone;  
the arm of flesh will fail you,  
ye dare not trust your own.  
Put on the gospel armour,  
each piece put on with prayer;  
where duty calls or danger,  
be never wanting there.

This is precisely Paul's point. We face an enemy for whom we are no match. If we face him and his on our own, we will be, as the saying goes, *toast!* We outmatched on our own. In fact, the proof of that is found in this same epistle.

In 2:1–5, Paul makes it clear that, apart from Christ, we were enslaved to the evil one. We were overpowered and helpless. We were hopeless. We were ruled by the devil and his godless system. We belonged to his world, as children of his evil age, with no hope of escape—at least no human hope (2:11–13). We had no interest—literally—in the gospel.

“But God” (2:4) stepped in, powerfully delivering us by the same power with which he had raised his crucified Son from the dead. He saved us by *his* gospel and in doing so he equipped us for victory over our greatest foe.

In many ways, this is the theme of this epistle: the church's victory in being what she is; the church *becoming in experience* what she is *essentially*.

This letter highlights the power of the gospel, which rescues and justifies is the same power that sanctifies. The same gospel that delivers us also defends us. Ultimately the gospel is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our defence. He is our armour. Victory is ours. Small wonder that it is said of us that we “are more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37). And therefore, as Wood puts it, “The Christian's protection is not to be sought in any works of his own but only in what Christ has done for him and in him.”

In this study, we will focus on what this armour is, but we will first spend time considering why we need it.

## We Must Be Well-Assured

The first thing we must see is the need to be well-assured. Writers are often told to mix up their vocabulary. Don't use the same word too many times in a short space. Paul evidently was not aware of this rule, because he tells his readers at least three times to "stand" (vv. 11, 13, 14). The word means to cause to stand, to stand firm, to establish or to place firmly. It is not merely an exhortation, but also an encouragement. That is, because of God in Christ, we *do* stand. Be assured of this!

Only with this assurance will the church put on the armour. We need confidence if we will be successful in our conquest. And the New Testament gives us this confidence. John wrote, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Jesus promised, "These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is ours (cf. 1:15ff). We must remember the initial gospel victory (2:1–4ff) if we will be motivated for continued victories.

As a pastor, one of the most frequent issues that I counsel people about is their assurance. Many struggle with insecurity and instability because they wrestle with assurance. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, aims to produce this instability and insecurity. He aims to produce joylessness by constantly accusing believers to God and to themselves. Part of the solution to this struggle is to behold the wonder and glory of Christ.

Years ago, there was a man in our church who constantly struggled with assurance. He would frequently tell me that he thought he had blasphemed the Holy Spirit, and that he was not a believer. One day, as I was talking to him about his assurance, I suggested that he just skip church. "Get drunk on Saturday and then play golf on Sunday," I told him. He looked at me with horror, and told me he could never do such a thing. When I asked why not, he said, "Because of Christ!" And then the penny dropped. He realised that affection for and devotion to Christ were all the "evidence" he needed to help him in the struggle with assurance.

Those who struggle with assurance, and are constantly caught up in the game of introspection, often find themselves rushing from duty to duty, but without true devotion. They are so caught up in works of righteousness that they forget to behold the wonder of Christ. And that only serves to exacerbate the problem. We will not be well-armed if we are not well-assured.

We must recognise that it is possible, by God's grace, to stand well-assured. The New Testament assures us of this truth time and again. Consider a few texts in this regard.

- Romans 5:1–2—Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- Romans 14:4—Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.
- 2 Corinthians 1:24—Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.
- 1 Peter 5:12—By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

- Jude 24–25—Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

The question is, *should* we have assurance? And the answer is, yes—if you have repented and believed and continue to repent and believe. As Jesus said, we are his disciples if we continue in his word (John 8:31). If we are truly Jesus’ disciples, we can enjoy the promise of life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began (2 Timothy 1:1). Those whom the Father gave to the Son *will* come to him, and will not be cast out (John 6:37). Because Jesus stands, we who are in him can stand too.

## We Must Be Well-Aware

The second major truth to note is that we must be well aware of where the battle rages. That is, we must realise that it is a battle for our affections. Paul uses the word “love” no fewer than sixteen times in this letter. He thanked God for their loving devotion (1:15–23). His prayer was that they would comprehend more of God’s love for them (3:14–19). Even as he closed this letter, he did so with a prayer for them to experience God’s love (6:23–24).

The evil one aims at misplaced affections by bringing God’s character into question. He directs us toward idolatry. He brought God’s good command into question in Eden (Genesis 3), and he has done so ever since. If he can get the believer to doubt God’s goodness, he can convince the believer to lose affection, and the battle is won. We must therefore be on guard in our affections. The armour of God protects every part of our being—our heart, soul, mind and strength—for it is with every part of our being (heart, soul, mind and strength) that we are to love God.

John MacArthur is correct: “Right theology without deep devotion to Christ cannot prevent the death of the church.” Sadly, the Ephesian assembly is a perfect example of this. Consider John’s word to these believers only a few years after Paul wrote to them:

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, “These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for my name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

(Revelation 2:1–4)

Even in the late 60s, this church maintained right doctrine and right discipline, but they had lost a right devotion. And Jesus, through John, rebuked them for it, warning them that he would remove their lampstand.

If we doubt God and his love for us, we will not love him. But we will love something. We may, like Demas, love this present world (2 Timothy 4:9), but if we lose our devotion we will not stand in the battle to which we have been called.

Martin Luther is known for saying that, before God saved him, he hated God. As much as he tried to obey God’s law, he felt only condemnation as he failed to live up to its perfect standard. And because he knew nothing of God’s goodness, he knew no love for God—even as he tried to please God. We

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must have right affections. As John Piper says, “The good news of the gospel is God. He is hat makes the gospel good news.”

At one point in his ministry, Jesus began foretelling his death in Jerusalem. Horrified, Peter rebuked him: “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” The Lord strongly rebuked Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Because Peter did not set his mind on the things of God, he hindered what God was trying to accomplish. Jesus then told the disciples that they needed to live cross-centred lives (Matthew 16:21–27).

Picking up this theme of setting your mind on the things of God, Paul wrote to the Colossians: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1–3).

Sadly, we are far too often infatuated with that which is fading and falling (see 1 John 2:12–17). The key to overcoming this wrong-headed infatuation is to embrace what Chalmers called “the expulsive power of a new affection.” As we set our affections on Christ, our affections for what is fading and falling will diminish. “The things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”

Do you know how much God loves you, believer? If you are persuaded of Christ’s deep love for you, you will guard your heart with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23). And you will pray for your fellow soldiers to know this same love, and to therefore guard their hearts. You will pray that your church will love its sovereign Saviour more than the satanic sin that daily tempts it.

The love you have will determine the life you live. Fear has its place, but perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). You must have Christ as your highest devotion. That is why daily devotions are so important. That is why gospel conversations are so vital. That is why small group gathering and Christ-centred preaching are so crucial. Parents, are you shepherding the hearts of your children to love the Lord?

It is vital that we be aware of the arena of this battle. If we are not, we will miss the heart of the matter. And if we miss the heart of the matter, we may become morally upright people, but it will be little more than nominal Christianity.

The war is not primarily against pornography, or drunkenness, or anger, or stealing, or lying, or gossiping. These things are the outworking of a deeper problem: a lack of affection for Christ. If you fight for a right affection, you will find your affection driving away these things that diminish your affection. A right affection will leave no place for pornography, or drunkenness, or anger, or stealing, or lying, or gossiping. The choice you face is simple: affection or defection. Which will it be?

But how do you fight for a right affection? Let me suggest a few things.

First, daily *rehearse* the gospel. *Hourly* rehearse the gospel—especially when you are tempted to despair and to disobey. Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians and the Philippians are saturated with the gospel—and he wrote those letter from prison! How he must have been tempted to despair in prison. But he did not allow himself to despair, but instead focused on the gospel.

Second, *remind* yourself of your Father's love. Remember, he is your *Father*, and a father deeply loves his child. Have you ever taken the time to reflect on that title: "Father"? What a privilege we have to call God our Father. What a privilege it is to relate to him as a child relates to a loving father!

Third, *rest* and *reflect* on the gospel. What a privilege it is to have one day in seven set aside for rest and reflection. Recently, as I sat in my study early on Sunday morning, I heard the noise of sweeping outside. There had been a storm in Brackenhurst the previous night, and when I looked out my window I saw the church custodian, who lives on the property, sweeping the driveway. I went outside, expressed my appreciation for his effort, but then told him to go rest. It was Sunday, and not the day for work! I encouraged him to rest and reflect on God's grace. That is what the Lord's Day should do for all of us.

Fourth, *remember* the gospel as you take opportunity to observe the Lord's Table. The Communion meal is an opportunity for us to remember the gospel. Take much advantage of it.

Fifth, form *righteous relationships* with others who are focused on the gospel. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Seek out those you can help with their affections, and those who can help you with yours. Pray with others. Gather with others. And do so at time when it is not "formally" arranged by the church! Do what you must to guard your devotion.

## We Must Be Well-Armoured

Finally, we must "put on the whole armour of God" (v. 11). Verses 14–17 detail the full armour of God, and as you reflect on the description of each piece you quickly realise that this armour is, in essence, the gospel. It is armour that you can take up *because of* right affections, and it is armour you can take up to *guard* right affections.

Without going into minute detail and therefore losing the big picture, let me quickly overview the armour that is listed here. With each of the six pieces of equipment, there is both an objective reality and a subjective response.

### The Belt of Truth

We are to "fasten on the belt of truth" (v. 14). The belt would hold the soldier's clothing in place and keep him unencumbered. When it was necessary to run, a soldier might tuck his tunic into his belt in order to free his legs. Christian soldiers likewise need to be unencumbered in spiritual warfare.

The believer's belt is a belt of truth.

*Objectively*, this speaks of the truth as it is in Jesus (4:21). We have been born again and therefore we know this truth. We have believed this truth. Objectively, we have been set free (John 8:32). Objectively, we are no longer under bondage to sin, to Satan, or to self. We are God's and he is ours through Christ. This is a given. The Christian has been clothed with the truth as it is in Jesus—the truth of the gospel; the gospel truth. God has provided this truth to the church, and to the church alone.

*Subjectively*, we are to live like it. This is most likely a reference to disciplined commitment to the truth; fidelity; a heart that is *fixed* on the truth. We are to bring this to mind and then respond with disciplined commitment to Christ because of this truth. Yes, we must do something!

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Believer, be a faithful steward of this gospel truth. If you are not, you won't stand practically even though you may be standing positionally. As Hodge says, "To enter on this spiritual conflict ignorant or doubting, would be to enter battle blind and lame. As the girdle gives strength and freedom of action, and therefore confidence, so does the truth when spiritually apprehended and believed."

## The Breastplate of Righteousness

We are, secondly, to "put on the breastplate of righteousness" (v. 14).

*Objectively*, this is the righteousness of Christ. We have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. This is the main thrust. If we rely on our righteousness, we are hopeless as we go forth to battle. We are to keep before us that we are accepted by God in Christ (1:6)! Hodge comments, "Many say it is our own righteousness, integrity, or rectitude of mind. But this is no protection. It cannot resist the accusations of conscience, the whispers of despondency, the power of temptation, much less the severity of the law or the assaults of Satan."

*Subjectively*, we respond with righteousness. Holiness becomes our grateful and joyful pursuit. In other words, because we *are* standing in righteousness (Romans 5:1-2; 1 Peter 5:12), we are committed to standing righteously (see Romans 6).

## The Shoes of Gospel Readiness

Third, we wear "as shoes for [our] feet ... the readiness given by the gospel of peace" (v. 15).

*Objectively*, this is the gospel of Christ. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (2:14-17; 1:2; cf. Rom 5:1, etc.). *Shalom* is objectively ours (Numbers 6:24-26). Remembering that this is what we have, we are empowered knowing that if God is for us, no one can effectively be against us (Romans 8:31).

*Subjectively*, we preach this gospel to ourselves, as we prepare to face the world, the flesh and the devil, by continually grounding in the gospel. Further, we proclaim it to others, which also becomes a means of being further convinced of its truth and what we have because of it. Sadly, as we remain silent, we find ourselves slain.

## The Shield of Faith

Fourth, we are "take up the shield of faith" (v. 16).

*Objectively*, this is faith in Christ, which comes from God (2:8-9). Having believed the truth of the gospel (1:13), we rest in this fact. We remind ourselves that we have believed and therefore still believe! What God gives, he does not take back. What we believed, and what we continue to believe, is true. We remind ourselves that, positionally, we are safe because we are justified by faith alone—the accusations of the evil one and of our conscience notwithstanding.

*Subjectively*, we respond in faith. We choose to believe God because we continue to grow in our knowledge of, and therefore confidence in, his character.

## The Helmet of Salvation

Fifth, we "take the helmet of salvation" (v. 17).

*Objectively*, this is salvation by Christ. I can say it no better than Hodge: “Salvation is itself the helmet. 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.” We grab hold of the fact that we have been delivered from the domain of darkness and have been transferred to the kingdom of God’s dear son. This has happened! This knowledge alone provides us with the assurance that we *do* stand and therefore we *can* stand. In other words, not only have we been transferred, we have also been transformed.

*Subjectively*, we keep putting this truth into our minds. We read and study to train our minds to properly respond to so great salvation. We do this individually as well as (especially?) corporately. We pursue gospel conversations. The more we do this, the narrower the gap between who we are in Christ and how we live for Christ.

## The Sword of the Spirit

Sixth, we take “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (v. 17).

*Objectively*, the word of God which points us to Christ (1:13). This is the purpose of the word of God. This word saved us: We need to remember this and be empowered as we remember its power. The word was the means to provide us with our standing, and remembering this objective truth empowers us to keep standing as we remember that we are standing.

*Subjectively*, we must learn it, grow in our conviction concerning it, and then use it in the battle. Jesus wielded the sword of the Spirit as he faced temptation; we must do the same.

## Summary

God has provided us with the gospel. And this good news is God himself, in Christ. There is an interesting messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11, which portrays Messiah himself as wearing this very suit of armour:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his loins, and faithfulness the belt of his waist.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

(Isaiah 11:1-9)

This serves as a promise of victory through Christ Jesus our Lord, who is the Victor (see Revelation 6:1ff). It is clear that God is our Armour, but for this to be our experience we must believe the gospel. When we do, God clothes us with Christ, we are made to stand, and we will continue to stand, clothed in him.

## Conclusion

The armour has been provided. We have all that we need. Now, let's learn how to keep putting it on.

AMEN