



Ephesians

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...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Ephesians 6:16

Concerning the “whole armor of God,” Paul continues his list with the words “above all.” The words carry an ambiguity in them and could mean either “over all,” or “in addition to all.” The latter is the proper sense. He is not stating this as a matter of importance, but of “covering all.” In other words, just as a soldier covers himself with a shield, we are to take up “the shield of faith.”

This shield in Greek is a *thureos*. The word comes from *thura*, meaning “door.” This is because of its shape which was oblong, about 4 feet by 2 ½ feet. It was sometimes curved on the inner side so that one could almost completely enclose themselves in it during an incoming salvo. It was held with the left arm by straps affixed to the inside. Such a shield was usually made of a light wood with a brass rim around it. After that, several layers of skins would cover it. It was slightly curved, and it was kept smooth, being polished with oil so that arrows and darts would glance off of it. Though a different style of shield was used by Israel, the curved shape of their shields would also allow for complete coverage as is referred to in the 5th Psalm –

“For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous;
With favor You will surround him as *with* a shield.” Psalm 5:12

As this shield covered all of the other armor, so “the shield of faith” is intended to cover all of the other “armor of God.” Its intent is that “you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”

The thought of the shield being a part of the “armor of God” goes all the way back to the great man of faith, Abraham. In Genesis 15, the Lord states to him –

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” Genesis 15:1

Just a few verses later, Abraham’s declaration of righteousness based on his faith was announced. This same “shield of faith” is available to us. But, it should be noted that this is not the active faith which is often referred to in the Bible. It is almost a passive one. It is that of endurance. A shield is a defensive item. It is meant to protect *from* something. Thus it reflects the covering of God, just as was promised to Abraham. As the fiery darts come in, we can stand behind the promises of God and remain protected. These fiery darts are well described by David in the 120th Psalm –

“What shall be given to you,
Or what shall be done to you,
You false tongue?
⁴ Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With coals of the broom tree!” Psalm 120:3, 4

The lies of the enemy, his verbal attacks through his workers of iniquity, the tempting words of a seductress, and the like are such fiery darts. They come in and we are to allow the Lord to shield us from them, letting them glance off by His protection. In turn, the 7th Psalm says that the Lord will then send back His fiery shafts of judgment –

“God *is* a just judge,
And God is angry *with the wicked* every day.
¹² If he does not turn back,
He will sharpen His sword;
He bends His bow and makes it ready.
¹³ He also prepares for Himself instruments of death;
He makes His arrows into fiery shafts.” Psalm 7:11-13

We are to trust the Lord by relying on the promises of His word. In so doing, the darts coming in will not harm us, and the Lord will take care of those who so attack. Vincent’s Word Studies states the following concerning the use of this armor –

“Temptation is thus represented as impelled from a distance. Satan attacks by indirection - through good things from which no evil is suspected. There is a hint of its propagating power: one sin draws another in its track: the flame of the fire-tipped dart spreads. Temptation acts on susceptible material. Self-confidence is combustible. Faith, in doing away with dependence

on self, takes away fuel for the dart. It creates sensitiveness to holy influences by which the power of temptation is neutralized. It enlists the direct aid of God.”

Life application: Let us exercise faith, just as those faithful of God in the past. Let us trust that what God offers is far better than whatever the devil can hurl in our direction. Temptations of sex, money, drugs, moral perversion of all kinds... these things need to be kept from us by God’s protective shield. Let us hide ourselves in the Lord through faith, and He will win the battle for us while keeping us safe from the enemy.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;
Ephesians 6:17

Paul now admonishes the Christian to “take the helmet of salvation.” Charles Ellicott notes that “There is a break here. We are said not to put on, but to “take” (or rather, receive)—a word specially appropriate to “salvation.”

The Greek word for “salvation” is not what is more commonly used. It gives the sense of “tending towards salvation.” In other words, it would be our hope of salvation. The thought is “And take the hope of your salvation, and put it on your head like a helmet.” It is an adornment for all to see, and it is a protection against anything which could come against our reason. We are not to intellectually surrender our hope. Rather we are to contemplate the hope of our salvation, knowing that it is our great protection for that time to come. It is a wonderful picture of eternal salvation. One cannot take on a hope of something that is not going to surely come about.

Vincent’s Word Studies describes the helmet in use at Paul’s time –

“The helmet was originally of skin, strengthened with bronze or other metal, and surmounted with a figure adorned with a horsehair crest. It was furnished with a visor to protect the face.”

We can look to the future with confidence, because we have a helmet of salvation which adorns us, and even our face is protected from harm. 1 Thessalonians further explains this helmet for us –

“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” 1 Thessalonians 5:8

We are then to also take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The sword was the only offensive weapon chosen by Paul. It was a most important part of the soldier’s armament. They were trained in, and carried, other weapons, but without a sword, they could not be considered as properly armed. Close-in fighting required this implement, and it is this

which Paul has in mind – direct contact fighting. The sword was a short sword with both edges highly sharpened.

Here, and at all times, the term, “sword of the Spirit” is not to be separated from the term, “the word of God.” Charismatics and others who claim “spiritual gifts” err if they think that they are granted a special “anointing” which makes them super-warriors of Christ without knowing and applying the word of God properly. Verses need to be taken in context, dispensations in time need to be considered, and our theology is to be Christ centered. When we fail to apply the word of God in this manner, we have no “sword of the Spirit.” Instead, we have parts of God’s word ripped out of intended context, but having no true power. To misuse Scripture is to be without our one offensive weapon which has been described by Paul.

Life application: From this verse, we should be comforted in the knowledge that we are saved. We are to take up that knowledge, and we are to adorn ourselves with it. Let us not waiver in this precept. And further, we are to stand fast on the word of God, using it as our main means of engaging the enemy. God wrote it, and so it is the most effective weapon we can employ. Let us never fail to keep it handy, apply it properly, and stand fast on its eternal precepts.

...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— Ephesians 6:18

Paul is still referring to the “whole armor of God” in these words. Though they are not being described with a metaphor as the previous verses were, they still follow the same thought. We know this with certainty, because it follows in the same admonition which was given in verse 10. There he instructs us to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” In order to accomplish this, we are to be “praying always.”

This fits with the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.” This does not mean that we get on our knees and stay there all day without accomplishing anything else. There are many types of prayers and the admonition fits any of them at any given time. There are formal prayers and informal prayers. There are silent prayers of the heart given in our times of distress or deep need, and there are vocal prayers which are given to build up others for courage, comfort, or edification. There are secret prayers, given between oneself and God which reveal the innermost soul of the one praying. There are public prayers offered for gatherings of God’s people as they meet to worship or petition Him. There are prepared prayers which are meticulously worded in order to inspire deep conviction, reverence, or courage. And there are sudden prayers which leap out of our souls as we come upon a moment of need.

Paul’s admonition to be “praying always” is one which should be taken literally. There is never a time that we can simply talk to God and it not be considered a “prayer.”

We are also to pray always with “supplication.” Prayer is more general, whereas supplication is more specific. When one has a family member suffering with illness, he will petition God through supplication, begging for relief for his loved one.

But whether it is through prayer or supplication, it is to be “in the Spirit.” This means that the heart is to be directed to God, and the prayers are not to simply be rote repetitions. The idea of “praying the rosary” is never hinted at in Scripture. We aren’t to just mindlessly repeat things in our prayers, but we are to rather use our minds and hearts to join with God in our prayer life.

Next he tells us that we are to be “watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Paul’s admonition to be watchful means that we are to look around us, observe what is going on, determine a need in others, and then to offer our prayers for that need. We aren’t to simply have our eyes closed to the world around us, but to be aware of what is happening in order to make effective prayers. These prayers then are to be “with all perseverance and supplication.”

When the need is seen, we don’t just pray once and cease, but we should rather pray frequently and specifically (supplication) for that which is before us. This is to be done “for all the saints” as well. We may not all agree in life, but if we are chosen by God because of having received Jesus Christ as our Savior, we should not withhold our prayers for our brothers and sisters. Color of skin, nation of origin, social status, and the like... none of these things should be a barrier to our offering of prayers for others.

Life application: Much is written about prayers and prayer life, books in fact. We can spend so much time reading about how to pray, and yet we can completely ignore the simple admonition that we are to be “praying always.” We don’t need to read books about how to pray. We need to simply pray. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, and our hearts focused on our relationship with God. In so doing, prayers will come naturally through simple and heartfelt communication.