

***Sunday @ Seven: Series 4:***

# ***The Whole Armour of God***

## ***Reflections on Ephesians 6.***

### ***Introduction***

In encouraging Christians to *'be strong'*, and to resist the *'devil's schemes'* the Bible warns us that *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"*.

The answer is *to put on the whole armour of God.*

### ***The whole Armour of God***

These reflections are focused on the passage at the end of the Letter to the Ephesians that describes the "whole armour of God" which the believers are to use as a defence against what is referred to as *'the wiles of the devil'*.

The context has been clearly set out in the earlier chapters of that Letter. God's grace is such that, in becoming Christians, the Ephesians have left the 'natural' realm where they *"walked according to the course of this world, and were governed by 'the prince of the air,' the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience."* They have been *"made alive"*; have been brought in from the cold, are fellow citizens with other believers (the saints), and are blessed with a new calling.

That privilege brings a responsibility to *"walk worthy of the vocation"*. There is an exhortation for them to be engaged in the practical outworking of that life as the functioning *'Body'* and the reflected *'Bride'*. But, that is not plain sailing for there is intense opposition from Satan who has not only lost subjects but is also witnessing a blossoming of an expression of values that are in total contrast to the ones he generates. It follows that he seeks to attack the believers. And it is against such an attack that the believer is to adopt and use this protective armour.

In this series we will look at that armour, beginning with an overview of the complete set and then going on to look at individual components.

Appreciating the armour of God is an important aspect of Christian living. In this case, nearly all the items are defensive ones. They cover the front and assume that there should be no retreat: the direction is always forward. There is little provision for the back because it is not envisaged that there would be any running away.

The only specifically offensive weapon is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That is to be used in a positive, constructive, way.

Taking the picture in its totality it is clearly implicit that there exists something that requires defending; something needs to be protected from the risk of attack. The question arises: what is it that needs such protection? The answer is that it is a 'treasure', a treasure of Christian experience, of "*Christ in you*" that needs safeguarding.

The previous chapters of Ephesians which provide the context of the passage under consideration specify that treasure by outlining the blessings that belong to the Christian. These include: being chosen, blessed with all spiritual blessings, forgiven, redeemed and transformed through an amazing power based on the work of Christ. Its potential is almost limitless. It emphasises a privilege and a responsibility. It is a commission. And a responsibility to "*walk worthy of that calling*".

In that sense, it is only valuable to the degree that it is operational and effective. It is not just a sterile treasure, an existing valuable commodity, but an ethos that is functional and actually functioning. It is the life-in-use and the behaviour-in-practice that needs protecting. It is a testimony that needs to be safeguarded.

The protection can be looked at in different ways.

On the one hand it is complete and comprehensive, covering each vulnerable part and offering protection against attack, thus ensuring security and safety.

But it also operates at different levels. We will look at three possible ones suggested by Ephesians.

- a. At the lowest, or basic, level it is safeguarding a possession. Christian life has always attracted opposition and aroused resistance. So, the purpose of this armour is to protect that which is in our possession and is valuable, especially as it has been given through the grace of God. It is a treasure in an earthen vessel. It is "*Christ in you - the hope of glory*". Or, as Paul tells the Galatians, "I live yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me". Using the armour is essential if that is to survive and thrive in spite of adverse forces. It is a precious possession that needs protecting.
- b. At another level, it is an operational something that Satan is seeking to frustrate and to destroy. The New Testament is full of incidents where life comes under attack, whether in the form of open opposition, false charges, or subtle, deviating, allurements. Jesus was tempted by the devil: believers are similarly tempted. Ephesians calls these attacks "*the wiles of the devil*". Sadly, the New Testament records a number of episodes where victims succumbed to such temptations; for example, Ananias and Sapphira gave in to deception; Demas loved this present evil world; the Corinthians fell into factions; etc. So the whole armour of God is needed as a defence against these open - and often subtle - attacks on the functional existence of a testimony to the grace of God. At this level the issue is not just a matter of personal possessions being violated but one of God purpose being frustrated and His honour tarnished.
- c. At a yet higher level, it is part of an eternal cosmic battle between God and Satan for the possession and well- (but mal- in the case of Satan) being. The Bible is full of this imagery and often depicts beasts and powers that war with each other. Apocalyptic literature is full of it, with a clear message that, following fierce conflicts vividly described, God eventually triumphs through the victory won by Christ on the Cross and His resurrection. Christ, the 'agent;' of God is triumphant through "*the things which He suffered*".

Within that framework there is another element emerging for in that scenario of cosmic conflict, the church and its behaviour (its testimony) is the key demonstration of God. It is that testimony, that evidence of a '*better way*' that is under attack and which needs to be shielded.

Thus we see that it is this aspect of being the church, of being God's people demonstrating a "*more excellent way*", which is to be protected. It is not just the smugness of the experience or a sense of assurance that we are the people of God, but it is the privilege and the responsibility of putting that into practice in new and different behaviour which derives from God and reflects all that he is.

In looking at the practical outworking of this it is not only doctrinally (as in 'basis of faith') but also practically (as in 'code of practice') that there is a need for the church and its individual members to be active and functioning, not just as possessors of the life but as those who live it out and practise it effectively, so that it is a testimony that speaks of God. It is the application of the spiritual aspect of the testimony that needs to be protected.

If that is the general purpose of the whole armour, then individual components have significance in the total process. We now go on to look at each of these in subsequent studies.

## ***THE BELT OF TRUTH AND THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS***

The first two individual items of the 'whole armour' that are mentioned are the *Belt of Truth* and the *Breastplate of Righteousness*. They belong to that category of providing protection. And they protect through the intrinsic quality of *truth* and *righteousness*.

We now go on to look at each of them separately

### The Belt of Truth

A belt is not a normal item of armour. It holds the tunic in place and is important for what it enables to happen. It is the Belt of Truth; all life emanates from this fundamental reality.

Looking at references to 'truth' in the New Testament, two clear aspects emerge

1. The body of truth. By this we mean: doctrine, revealed wisdom from God, the true definition and description of life, the world and the future. The Bible is the Word of God and is the sole authority for salvation and practice. Faith is founded on truth. Pilate asked: '*What is truth?*' Jesus said, "*I am the truth*". He is the total revelation of God. Christian experience is based on believing that truth - the truth that '*sets you free*'. The truth is what is believed at conversion and is the basis of Christian life. It is the impregnable foundation. Salvation comes from trusting that God's own Son came to take our place, died on the Cross to forgive us our sins, rose again and lives to intercede for us. That truth - not just outward works or expressions - is vital and essential. Fellowship depends on possession by faith of such truth.
2. Truth in the sense of being true. By this we mean integrity, genuineness sincerity. Jesus said, when speaking to the woman of Samaria, "*They that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth*". It is that genuineness, that permeation, that integration of truth throughout every aspect of our life that is essential as a safeguard.

The 'belt of truth' refers to possession of that body of truth and its integrity as a dynamic life-style. That is not something that we ourselves produce, but is something we possess by faith, through believing in the truth. The true life is a righteousness given wholly by God.

### The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate guards the vulnerable area of the heart and lungs and other vital organs. It is made of one piece and allows no chink to appear.

Looking at references in the Bible to righteousness suggests three aspects.

1. Righteousness is a gift from God. It is embodied in the Lord Jesus. It is not the acquisition of merit but a commodity that comes from God, is complete, satisfies the requirements of the Law, but is of grace. It is complete and comprehensive.
2. It is obtained by faith, not by works. It is credited to us by God as a result of our faith.
3. It requires practical maintenance and outworking. It is to be sought; it is to be looked after; it entails prioritisation in order to be adequate and capable of protecting us.

The Breastplate of Righteousness covers the most important body parts, namely the heart, the lungs and the intestines. These are vulnerable but the one-piece breastplate is provided to cover all of that and to provide the protection that is necessary. It is complete it has no chink in it.

The breastplate is described as being the breastplate of **righteousness**, of integrity, of reality, and truth.

We are told in the New Testament that this righteousness is based on that which was modelled in the Old Testament. There, to compensate for sinful nature, both in terms of its transgression towards God and iniquity towards others, a whole set of practices was introduced to pay for, and to compensate for, all the inadequacy of human fallibility. By virtue of keeping the Law righteousness could be established. In practice, that was often reduced to outward actions and superficial rituals; and it was possible - indeed probable - that its practitioners were putting on an act. It was external only, concealing a different 'heart'.

In the New Testament, however, there is a righteousness that is "*outside the law.*"

1. It was similar to the old practice: i.e. righteousness, integrity, completeness, holiness, etc. – but different both in its quality and in the means of its acquisition. It was described by the Prophets as a case of [God's] laws being written on the heart, a righteousness that originated within before being expressed outwardly. It was genuine righteousness because it was Christ's righteousness. He came to fulfil what the Law had failed to do
2. It is obtained by other means than by keeping the law. It is by faith through grace. This is the righteousness that is embodied in the Lord Jesus who came from God as a righteousness that is obtainable by faith. It is a gift that God gives. This righteousness is only possible through accepting Jesus Christ.

Righteousness - given by God and received by faith - then has to be manifested by living out that new life. Reflection on this particular component reminds us of Paul's words in Galatians 2: "*I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me.*" In Paul's writings there is constant urging of believers to let Christ develop to maturity in their lives. He prays for the Galatians: "*that Christ may be formed in you*". Earlier, he exhorts the Ephesians that they should become mature, and not "*tossed about with every wind of doctrine*". In Philippians, he talks about, "*pressing on to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" And to the Colossians he says: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" so that it permeates the whole being.

It is that possession and accommodation of the new life that is the righteousness that provides protection. It is "*Christ in you the hope of glory*". Or, as John puts it, "*Greater is He that is in you than he which is in the world.*" Its unique quality is its comprehensiveness and its fulness, so that no part of ordinary life is left untouched. Righteousness is the substance which is able to resist the attacks of the evil one. As the hymn puts it: "*Clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne*". Christ is our righteousness. It is only as He is allowed to live within us and through us that we are protected. And so the Christian's armour for defence is totally attributable to all that God has given in the gift of Christ, and in the growth of that new life into maturity.

There is an added protection through the Shield of faith. We come to that next.

## ***THE SHIELD OF FAITH***

We now come to our third component of the “Whole Armour of God”. This is concerned with the “Shield of Faith”.

In our consideration of this particular aspect of the armour we will look first of all at the characteristics of a shield.

### 1. The Shield

A shield is an added layer of defence. It is not an optional extra but an integrated item of the whole armour: it provides added protection. It is freestanding; it is a complete unit; it absorbs the impact of any missiles aimed at it; it is something that is controllable by the defender. It often has an identifying mark on it with a symbol of the army of the particular fighter.

A number of these features offer important lessons for Christian behaviour. The shield is something that is additional to the standard armour. The ‘*shield of faith*’ is over and above the righteousness provided by God. It is a second level of defence for the defender to use intelligently. By placing a ‘badge’ on the shield we indicate clearly in whom – and in what - we put our trust and to whom a shield belongs. Our defence is a defence as a Christian; and our trust is in God and in His enabling.

The shield is also flexible in that it can be used in different situations and in varying circumstances to provide protection. It is used intelligently by the one who wields it. The Christian is encouraged to be active, positive and purposeful in defending himself against “the wiles of the devil”.

Another feature of the use of the shield is its potential as a corporate tool. An army can band together and the whole set of shields formed into a cover. That is the experience of the church when believers group together and defensively form a protective barrier against the attacks of the evil one.

### 2. Faith

It is the shield of **faith**. When we look at faith, a number of important lessons emerge. Faith is active believing. It is something that we believe in; it is a stance, a commitment to a truth and to promises.

There has to be faith in something. The Bible says that “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*”. Using the ‘shield of faith’ is exercising faith, belief, trust, confidence in God as He is revealed in His Word. It is trusting that God is “*stronger than Satan or sin*”. It is trusting that God understands our situation. It is confidence in the power of God. It is trust in the promise contained in His Word. The clearer the object, the stronger the faith.

That faith brings a number of benefits, chief of which are a sense of peace, safety and security when all around is stormy and turbulent. Jesus said “*My peace I give to you*”. That is a peace that comes through the exercise of faith even in the wildest of circumstances. And so, however fierce the conflict may be, the use of ‘*the shield of faith*’ is something that generates quietness, confidence, and a resting in the protection that God offers.

### 3. The Adversary

The attacker is described as “the evil one”. This goes back to the origin of history where Satan tempted Adam who succumbed to his allurements and disobeyed God. Ever since, that has been humanity’s position. The gospel is an account of God coming through Christ to redeem man for Himself. When we become Christians we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son.

But Satan will not let it rest there, and so all his endeavours are designed to destroy our life, to win us back, or at best to get us to deviate from allegiance to God. His is an all-out attack. He has already been defeated but he does not accept that; regardless, he endeavours night and day to attack the believer; hence the need for defensive mechanism.

In this particular passage the attacks are described as ‘flaming arrows’. They come unexpectedly but they are dangerous when they are fired. They not only penetrate but also can burn and cause considerable damage to the soul. That is why the “Shield of Faith” is so important.

#### 4. Using the Shield

In considering how we can use the ‘*shield of faith*’ to defend against the ‘*flaming arrows of the evil one*’ the Bible has a number of examples.

- a. In the first place it is important to exercise faith in regard to **doctrine**. We need to know what the promises are, therefore a thorough knowledge of the Bible, its teaching and all that it reveals about God and of God’s ways is important. This is the peacetime practice that is so valuable in war; and it is faith in this truth that the shield uses when it protects us from the flaming darts of the evil one. For example the ‘evil one’ can suggest, when things are difficult, that God has abandoned us. But the truth of Scripture confirms that God never does abandon His people and He remains “*the same, yesterday, today and forever*”. Knowledge of that is comforting. The shield of faith is laying hold of that truth and standing firm with that deep knowledge that defies the apparent phenomena that prevail.
- b. Prayer is another way of using the shield of faith. The New Testament is full of references to praying: for example, pray without ceasing, pray in every situation, pray with confidence because “we do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”. It is comforting to know, for example, that Jesus said to Peter: “Peter, I have prayed for you”. Satan had sought to destroy him and to lead him astray, but he is the subject of divine prayer. In John 17 we have the Lord Jesus praying for His disciples. And so, if God and Jesus pray for us, we should also pray for ourselves and be diligent in that particular exercise.
- c. It’s also important to pay attention to **behaviour**, and to avoid certain things and to concentrate on others. Here are some examples from the New Testament. Peter, writing to the persecuted believers, says: “*Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm, and have faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*” John, in his epistle, says: “*He who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work*”. James says: “*Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter into mourning and your joy into gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up*”.
- d. Paul advises Timothy: “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart. Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel, instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them into a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

- e. Paul tells the Ephesians: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. And do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must do so no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”
- f. To Timothy, Paul says: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”
- g. Peter says: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy He has given us a new birth into living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold which perishes - even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour”.
- h. Peter again says: “For this very reason make every effort to add your faith goodness; and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge self control; and to self control perseverance; and to perseverance Godliness; and to Godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.”
- i. John says: “This is the victory that has overcome the world even your faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God”.

The Shield of faith is indeed a powerful and versatile weapon in the Christian’s armoury.

We go on now to consider the Helmet of Salvation.

## ***THE HELMET OF SALVATION***

Having enjoyed the comfort of protection through the *Breastplate of Righteousness* and then having the *Shield of Faith* which can be handled and used to quench the *fiery arrows of the evil one*, we now come to another static piece of protection: *the Helmet of Salvation*.

It has similarities with the *Breastplate of Righteousness* in that it is a fixture, providing total coverage for a vital part of the body. But there are some differences also. Righteousness is a 'credited' condition; salvation is something that happens to us. The torso is the seat of vital life organs; the head is the control centre of operations.

In this study we will look at two aspects of this component: salvation and the mind (= the head that the helmet protects).

### 1. SALVATION

Salvation is a key concept in Christian experience. It refers to the provision that makes it possible to be saved from something and to be saved for something else. The idea is one of rescue or deliverance, made possible by the work of a Saviour; Jesus is that Saviour – “*you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.*” It is part of a major intention, or purpose. “*God was, in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself*” Jesus came in fulfilment of the Divine Plan and Purpose: “*I have finished the work You gave me to do*” and Paul says to Timothy “*Here is a trustworthy saying: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners- of whom I am the worst*” .

That purpose – and process – is beautifully described in the words of the well-known text, John 3: 16. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.*”

Salvation means being “*translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son.*”

#### a. Context

Salvation has to be set in context. Salvation is for the world, that is, the people who inhabit this world. All humanity shares a common culture. For example, Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2: “*you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.*” In a further reference in the same chapter, he says, “*remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, ... without hope and without God in the world.*” So, salvation is set in the context of a people who are naturally and universally apart from God by natural birth. That means that we belong to a worldly context, the same as everyone else. And, being in that context has implications.

#### b. Condition

Living ‘natural’ lives in that context has consequences. The natural behaviour is in fact sinful behaviour. And sinful behaviour leads to death and destruction. In other words, we are lost. The sinful environment which surrounds us and the sinful nature that we possess mean that we are condemned.

We need to be rescued.

### c. Intervention

It is into this set of circumstances that God intervened in His work of salvation. Christ came into the world to effect this salvation. He did that by sharing our nature, taking on our sin and effecting release through the experience of Calvary and the Resurrection.

Against that background a Loving God shows His concern as described in that well-loved test: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."*

*There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in."*

### d. Detachment

When, by faith, we respond to that salvation offered in Christ then we are, in effect, detached from sin and its grip on us. There is forgiveness, cleansing and liberation. Wesley's hymn says, *"My chains fell off, my heart was free"*. John says: *"The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin"*. Such a salvation means that we are saved from sin, its grip and its consequences. \_

### e. Attachment

Salvation is based on the fact that Jesus died – and rose again. In that He is risen He is freed from sin's claims, the price has been paid; and He is now alive, immune to sin. By believing, we share in that resurrection feat and are attached to Christ. We have been born again; we have new life in Him. As the chorus puts it: *"I have decided to follow Jesus"*. And, in 2 Corinthians says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

### f. Commitment

The attachment to the gospel message leads to a commitment and a total change in lifestyle. It is regeneration and re-creation. In Ephesians, Paul says: *"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. .. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* In 2 Corinthians he emphasises the fact that there is a new focus, *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again."* Or, in Colossians, *"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."*

It is succinctly summed up in Titus 2: 11, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."*

### g. Experience

That salvation is a wonderful experience. It is a privilege, a joy, an obligation and a responsibility. It is a venture.

Several features accompany that experience. For example:

i. Praise

*'So great salvation'* is a phrase used in Hebrews; it sums up the wonder of this provision. That leads to praise and worship, the realisation and expression of appreciation for such a wonderful provision and its application in our lives. Salvation is something to cherish.

ii. Witness

It is also something to share. That is done in many ways. For example, there is evangelism and sharing the good news with others. There is the manifestation of the experience in conduct (*'you are living epistles, known and read of all men'*)

iii. Nurture

It is a new, different, and in many ways, a delicate existence. It requires careful nurturing through feeding and exercise, learning and support. That is where prayer, Scripture, fellowship and meeting together, and other spiritual exercises, play such an important part in ensuring the growth and welfare of this new life.

It is precious and needs protecting, not only to safeguard its existence, but also to ensure that its essence becomes a motivating element in Christian testimony.

That is where the helmet comes in.

## 2. Helmet of salvation

The helmet is something that protects the head. That is where the mind resides; and in the New Testament the mind plays a significant part in the experience of salvation and its realisation in practice. The Bible encourages the use of the mind and the intelligent application of the truth in the outworking of salvation.

To begin with, it is based on truth

a. The facts

Fundamental to his exhortations and encouragement to the NT churches and believers, Paul cites the basic facts of the salvation message: *"Christ died for our sins and was raised again for our justification."* After his failure in Athens he came to Corinth declaring that *"I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."* To the Corinthians, Galatians and Romans he stresses the truth bound in this central tenet. He is *"not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation."* What has happened is according to the foreknowledge and purpose of God. And, it is something that takes effective place in believers' lives.

The facts are that Jesus died and rose again for us. It is also a fact that we are implicated in what happened to Christ. Romans says: *"Knowing that we died with Christ and we are also raised with Him."* Paul declares that *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* What happened to Jesus applies to us: when we trusted in Him we ere

identified with Him so that, “*if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!*”

But, the facts need to affect practice: that is where the mind comes in.

#### b. The Outworking

Although the mind, as a faculty, is natural – and neutral – it becomes sanctified. Corinthians declares that, having received Christ, “*we have the mind of Christ*” Romans demonstrates that “*the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;*”

Writing to the Philippians. Paul says: “*Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus*” and, as He counted Himself nothing, so are we to do that. In Romans, he says: “*Count yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” In Ephesians he says further, “*Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*” This is an activity of the mind as we “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that works within you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*”

With varying practices, we can sometimes miss out on the powerful significance of the symbol represented by the concept of baptism – a token burial of ‘dead’ people and a ‘resurrection’ of new life: dead to sin but alive to God.

In Romans 6 this teaching is developed further when we are told to “*count ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive to God*”. It is not based just on feelings but it is an intellectual operation where we put into practice what has been accomplished by God. 2 Corinthians says that “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new; and all things are of God.*” That means that there is a transformation. Elsewhere Paul says, “*we have been translated from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His dear Son.*” In Ephesians it says that we have been quickened and made alive .. brought in from being strangers and foreigners; and this is something that we have to remind ourselves constantly. So when sinful temptations come we have to work out that we’re dead and therefore cannot respond to them because we don’t hear them: we don’t exist. But, in contrast, we do exist and are alive to the things of God; and when God’s Spirit comes leading, guiding, prompting and stimulating, and then we do respond and in that sense are led by the Spirit of God. This comes through the mind.

The positive aspect of this is expanded on in Romans 12 where it says: “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will.*” That transformation enables the Christian to tune in to God’s will and prove the privilege and excellence of this new way, this “*more excellent way*”. The key once again is the mind – working out in experience what has been accomplished and purposed in Christ.

#### c. Responsibility

It is difficult to live like that: it almost means being spiritually ‘schizophrenic’! It means having to convince ourselves that we are indeed ‘*citizens of heaven*’ and ‘*sons of God*’ even though we still live on earth and are subject to all the pressures of ‘natural life’. It is the ‘mind’ that operates in these circumstances.

There are two instances where Paul reminds the young Christians of the complete provision of salvation through the operation of the mind.

- i. To the Philippians he says: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* The mind is safeguarded by that ‘helmet of salvation’ and ensures peace *‘in this dark world of woe’*.
- ii. Secondly, he says to Timothy: *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind.”*

It is with that confidence that we can wear the ‘helmet of salvation’ and be assured that indeed He will enable us to enjoy and be motivated by our salvation knowing that the ‘helmet of salvation’ and the exercise of the mind in appropriating the truths of the Gospel Message will indeed *“keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”*.

With that boldness we are ready to wield the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

We will look at that next time.

## ***THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT***

We now come to look at the final item in the whole armour of God, the *Sword of the Spirit*.

### 1. The Sword of the Spirit

Of the items we have considered so far, some have been static [the *Breastplate of Righteousness* and the *Helmet of Salvation*] while others [the *Shield of Faith*] have been usable by manipulation. The *Sword of the Spirit* it belongs to this latter category. The sword is a weapon; it is something to be used.

#### a. The Sword

When we think of a sword, a number of features come to mind. It is essentially a weapon to be handled, not a piece of armour to put on. It is not an item that is placed around the body to protect it from external attacks but an instrument that can be used to further the cause of the soldier in the battle. Of course, it can be used to protect and to ward off any missiles that might come our way; it can deflect attacks; it can parry anything that is levelled against us. But its main use is to attack, to penetrate, to probe, to cut open, to pierce. In this sense it is something that extends the power and purpose of the soldier in moving from its own protective island to advance into, and to gain a foothold in enemy territory. A sword is manipulated according to purpose: it enables that project to be achieved.

#### b. The sword of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the executive of God's purpose. Within the Trinity, there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father designed and conceived, the Son embodied, and the Spirit is the one who applies that in practice. When the Lord Jesus had finished His work on earth He said to the disciples that He would be returning to His Father and that He would ask the Father to send a Comforter, the Holy Spirit who would carry out and complete the work that He had started in accordance with the will and purpose of God. In the Old Testament, the Spirit makes things happen. In the New Testament it is also the Spirit that makes things happen. It is interesting that one description of the Book of Acts is 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit' as the Holy Spirit, effected and implemented the purpose of God in the early church.

#### c. The Word of God

But the *Sword of the Spirit* is also said to be the word of God. As the Word of God, it is an extension of the creative speaking of God Almighty. Right from the beginning of Genesis the Word of God is the means used to bring things into being. In Creation, "God said" and it was. And, right through the Old Testament God has spoken, sometimes to launch something (such as in the experience of Noah, Abraham or Moses) or in terms of comfort and consolation (as in the experiences of David) or in teaching (e.g. the proverbs of Solomon) or in the healing words that were spoken through the prophets to wayward Israel. The Word of God is something that brings things into being: it is creative.

The Christian therefore is equipped with this very powerful weapon which is there to enable the soldier to fulfil the purpose of God. It reinforces the protection, but it also enables the aggressive, active, deliberate action of extension and creation.

### 2. Examples from Scripture

Having looked at the general characteristics of the *Sword of the Spirit* and some of the things it might represent, we now go on to examples from Scripture.

#### a. Gideon

Gideon was called upon, fearful as he was, to come out of defensive hiding to attack the Midianites. After a protracted process of elimination and confirmation he takes his diminutive army down the hill towards the camp of the Midianites shouting “the sword of the Lord and of Gideon”. Symbolically, the sword is the instrument of God to enable Gideon, on his behalf, to lead the people to overcome the enemy and to repossess the territory, striking fear into their hearts. Here, it worked and the Midianites fled.

#### b. David

There is an incident where David goes to the Temple seeking sustenance and equipment to help him and his colleagues as they are fleeing from Saul and seeking to survive. He is given the bread that had been displayed in the Temple and asks for a sword. The priest’s reply is that the only sword there is “the sword of Goliath” and he says: “Give me that one because there is none like it”.. Prior to the battle with Goliath he had been offered Saul’s sword and, after he tried it on, said that he was not familiar with it for it was not what he normally used; so he and laid them aside. Instead, he took what he was familiar with and with the stones from the sling slew Goliath. However this particular sword epitomized for him the help that God had given him in overcoming this giant. David had used it that sword to cut off Goliath’s head, hence his words: “there is no sword like that one”. So David again found that the sword is something that enabled him to advance the purpose of God.

#### c. Peter

There is an incident in the Gospels where the confused Peter took his sword and struck off the ear of the High Priest’s servant, who had come to arrest the Lord Jesus. He was rebuked for this by Jesus showed that the way the world uses a sword is not the way that the Christian is to use it. It is not to vent anger against someone else but is to be used to achieve something that is positive.

#### d. The Word of God as the sword in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the ‘word’ aspect of the sword is what is critical. It is the word that achieves things. There are several examples we can look at.

##### 1. Gospels

The word is comforting as the followers and disciples found during the feeding of the 5000 when Jesus said, “My words are spirit and they are life” and Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life?” On so many occasions Jesus spoke the word which resulted in people coming to life from the death and in people being healed. The Sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is God’s weapon for achievement.

And of course in the discourse in John 13 – 17 the Lord Jesus shows that the Holy Spirit had been sent to take that word and to apply it and to bring things to pass and to see achievement.

##### 2. Acts

In the book of Acts, it was the word of God that they used and although there were great demands for social activity they made it quite clear that their priority was to attend to the word of God. No incident shows this more clearly than when Peter and John went to the temple and said to the lame man “Silver and gold I don’t have. What I do have I give you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk.” And those

words meant healing for that particular man. It was words that arrested Saul of Tarsus on his journey and through those words he was transformed and spent his life sharing the words of God in order to establish and to build up and to encourage.

### 3. The Epistles

Timothy is told to continue to exercise, teach, preach and to apply that word of God, not in any sense of condemnation but in order to bring things into being.

Within this context it is also used to analyze and assess situations when motivation is unclear. In Hebrews it says that “the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit.” Here we see an examination of motives and practice.

### 4. Revelation

That sword is again featured in Revelation. It is part of the vision John saw. When God’s Spirit speaks to the churches and to the church at Pergamum, He is the “One who has the sharp double-edged sword” and He uses that to recognize their achievements already but also to identify some of the flaws and difficulties that they had in the church which needed to be cleared up if they were to hold that experience and the blessing and the survival help of Almighty God.

## 2. What can we learn then from the Sword of the Spirit?

Clearly it is a vital item in the equipment of the Christian. It has a part to play in defence but its main work is in advance, and going into battle, to discern and understand situations and to be the means of applying the power of God in a creative way in all situations.

As we share from our own experiences, those occasions when the word has been used by God to arrest us, when we have been able to use the word of God, not only as a comforting protection but also as something in which we believe and hold onto very firmly, as we exercise our faith. The word has enabled us not only to cope with situations but also to advance. The privilege of the Christian is to prove that the word of God is indeed quick and powerful and able to accomplish God’s purpose on earth. As Isaiah says, “My word will not return unto me void, but will accomplish that to which I sent it.”

To use the sword effectively we need to know its potential, we need to know what it is, we need to know where and when it is to be used; we need to know what it is designed for. We also need to be totally familiar with it and its use. To be able to apply the word of God from we need prior knowledge of what scripture says. It is not a matter of an emergency visit to the medicine cabinet but it is a matter of recalling words that we have already imbibed. That is the emphasis in John 16 that the Holy Spirit will bring to our remembrance what God has said: He will bring those words to life. What does characterize many of the saints of God is their ability to use that word in a positive way at key times and in critical situations.

So the Sword of the Spirit is a mighty weapon. It not only has the effectiveness of the spirit but it also has the authority of the word of God as we follow in His footsteps seeking to advance His kingdom.

Thus fully equipped with the armour of defence and equipped with the sword for advance we move forward. But in that moving forward it is a hazardous occupation and can be a lonely expedition.

It is not surprising therefore that Paul says: “Pray for me”. And that is the topic we will look at next time.

## ***PRAYER - for ALL SAINTS***

We have now completed our survey of the various items of armour, and now come to the final exhortation to “*pray in the Spirit*” as a means of standing together and enlisting the “*help of the Lord*”.

In fact this is an additional activity, not a piece of armour, an extra and vital resource that accompanies the wearing of the armour and the wielding of the *Sword of the Spirit*.

Paul here is conscious of the Ephesians, and other Christians scattered in the area, who were maintaining a brave stance against the “*wiles of the Devil*” and needing encouragement. To them he gives the exhortation to “*pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*” and adds, “*Be alert and always keep praying for all the saints*” and “*pray also for me*”.

We begin by looking at the concept of prayer.

### 1. Prayer (i.e. a new weapon in this armoury).

Prayer is not really a part of the initial armoury, but an additional resource that the Christian can call upon to exercise both in defence and in attack.

Prayer is the invocation of God’s power. Prayer is a request for God to be at work in accomplishing what He wants to see brought about. When the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray He said to them that they should acknowledge God’s existence in heaven and pray (ask) that that power would be exercised on earth. “*Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*”.

Prayer is the acknowledgement that this is not only an earthly battle, a struggle for survival and victory that is (as we saw in the first study) but something that is operating at a cosmic level. For our purposes when Paul encourages the Christians to pray, he is saying to them that they should exercise this prerogative that they have to ‘*call upon God*’ to exercise His power in these situations.

Here are some examples of prayer

#### a. Paul

Paul himself clearly prayed and we have a number of references in the New Testament that illustrate that. Asking for prayer for himself and praying for others is not new to Paul, as the following passages show:

- *Brothers, pray for us.* (1 Thess 5.25)
- *Pray for us.* (Heb. 13.18)
- *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message* (Col. 4.3. )
- *Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured.* (2 Thess 3.1)
- *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me* (Eph 6.19)

- *Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. (Rom 15.31)*

These prayers for himself (and for those with him) are for protection, strength and enabling; and above all, for furtherance of the witness; that he would be given opportunities to fulfil and complete the mission that he was engaged in. These are not selfish prayers but prayers that seek the help of God for him in fulfilling his divinely appointed commission.

Paul also prayed for the Christians and in each of his letters he reminds them of that. In some of the letters he gives us, additionally, an insight into what he prayed for them. as the following samples show.

- *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened (Eph 1.18 )*
- *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Eph 3.16 18 )*
- *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. (Col 1.3)*
- *We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ... that you may live a life worthy of the Lord: (Col 1.9)*
- *With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, (2 Thess 1.11, 12)*
- *I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith. (Phm 1.6)*

In these prayers for them, he prays for insight, understanding, appreciation of their privilege and, above all, for empowerment and enabling by God as they seek to witness for Him.

He asks that they realize the resources, the powerful divine power and resources, that are at their disposal and they are to use to enable them to fulfil their purposes. These prayers are invocations for divine success in their missions.

#### b. Jesus

We also have the example of the Lord Jesus praying.

There are two features of the prayers of Jesus.

- On the one hand there are a number of occasions when He prays before events. Like us, he seeks God's help to carry out a particular task. For example, before the feeding of the 5000 He looks up to heaven and asks for God's enabling. Before choosing the disciples He spends all night in prayer to seek the help of God on this important decision or set of decisions.
- He also does something that we very rarely do and that is He deliberately prays after events. It is so easy to bask in success and to forget to say thank you. But Jesus went to great lengths to make sure that after experiencing the success that comes from God He continued to pray so that He was in constant touch with His Father, God and remained dependent. No danger of him slipping from a pinnacle.

We also appreciate that when He prayed He, too, prayed for the outworking of God's purpose (as we have seen above in the Lord's Prayer) and also for the welfare and the effectiveness of the disciples and those who would come after them, which includes us.

## 2. Exhortations to pray

In this a situation, Paul writing to the Ephesians gives them specific instructions.

### a. Pray in the Spirit

The essential command is that they should pray. He elaborates that by saying that they should pray in the spirit. For example,

- *Pray in the Spirit* (Ephesians 6. 18)
- *I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind;* (1 Cor 15)
- *But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.* (Jude 1.20)
- *As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God* (Romans 8. 14);
- *The Spirit helps us in our weakness...the Spirit intercedes for us* (Romans 8. 26.)

“*Prayer in the Spirit*” is a very difficult phrase to interpret but if we look at it in the New Testament context and look at reference is there to the spirit and the place of the spirit in prayer then clearly it would indicate that praying in the spirit means praying with the new life that has been given to us in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 makes it very clear that what distinguishes a Christian is the possession of the new life, the life of the Spirit. That new life is different from the old one and aspires after different things; and is in touch with God. The Holy Spirit, possessing our lives, prays for us. It is an activity that can be carried out because of this supernatural aspect to Christian experience. Prayer is not human endeavour but it is the divine power finding a way to work through human channels.

That does not mean automatic response. In writing to the Corinthians he emphasizes the importance of understanding and praying with the mind. That is when the Christian ‘*prays in the spirit*’, it is a deliberate, conscious, action that has, as its clear intention, the calling on God for a demonstration of His power in the situations that are being encountered.

### b. Pray at all times

He also says *pray at all times*. As we saw above, the Lord Jesus saw praying after events as important as praying before them. Prayer should take place all the time. To the Thessalonians he said, “*Pray without ceasing.*” Prayer is not just a crisis: prayer is constant communion. At no time is the Christian exempt from needing and seeking the help of God in any practical everyday situation.

### c. Pray in different ways

Prayer is to be carried out in different ways and there is specific reference here to requests. Prayer is a Christian activity that is conducted by human personalities. There are different ways in which people pray. Examples from the Old Testament and the New Testament would indicate that, as occasions differ and situations change, so do the forms, and sometimes the reasons for, prayers, vary. The majority of prayers are spoken requests but prayer can also be done by “*the upward glancing of an eye when none but God is near*”. It can be done by urgent pleading; it can be done by pushing through the crowd just to ‘*touch the hem of His garment*’. God knows and interprets what we do when we pray and take actions that indicate our request for God to act and move in our lives. But that difference doesn’t extend to a performance. And Jesus clearly indicates in the Sermon on the Mount that ostentatious performance and hypocritical display are not acceptable. Prayer is something that is to be genuine, sincere, often unobtrusive but nevertheless consistent and real.

d. Pray for all saints

And that prayer is to be for '*all saints*'. It would be easy to select the few and to favour certain aspects; but, as all are members of the one Body, the exhortation in this battle is to *pray for all saints* whoever they are, wherever they are and whatever they are doing. And it is our privilege as Christians to engage in praying for all saints right across our world. We should pray for those in our own Christian community. We should pray for all Christians in our locality and country. But we should also consistently pray for *all saints* everywhere, especially those who in these days are suffering severely for their faith and are exposed to situations where heavenly warfare is happening and is the experience that they encounter.

e. Pray for me

And Paul says, "*Pray for me*" that opportunity be given to him to carry out his ministry effectively.

## *Summary*

So we see this picture of the armour complete in items for defence, some static and some to be attack weapons wielded by the defender. One of those is the *Sword of the Spirit* (the *Word of God*) which is “*quick and powerful sharper than any two edged sword*”: it is able to penetrate, it is able to proclaim, it is able to exercise faith in situations; it is the instrument that God uses to guide, to encourage and to enable His people.

Over and above that there is the experience of *praying in the spirit, at all times, in different ways, for all saints*. That is the corporate strength of the church that together the whole power of God can be experienced and practised by His people.

Whatever the current circumstances are, and whatever the past has been, one thing would appear to be quite obvious: that to be a Christian in our day and age is going to be more and more difficult as the climate and situations become less sympathetic and often more evident in their overt opposition.

There is therefore the need to “*put on the whole armour of God*” knowing that it is not just a matter of personal survival but also the fulfilment of the purpose of God in our day and age, so that we become faithful stewards of the things of God. In that it is good not only to use the armour effectively but also to engage in praying, both for ourselves and especially for others.

That is done by enjoying the benefits of the protective armour, wielding the *Sword of the Spirit*, and *praying in the spirit at all times and many ways for all saints*”. The Book of Revelation shows that “*the prayers of the saints*” are a vital element in that process of ‘*overcoming*’.

We hope that these studies in that Whole armour of God have been, and will continue to be, a help to “*Stand up for Jesus ye soldiers of the Cross.*”