

Sanctification
Stand Strong for Holiness
Preparation – Part 2

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Introduction

Our study of the pursuit of holiness is currently concentrating on the experience of temptation. The flight from disobedience and the quest for godliness will be opposed by the desire of the flesh from within and pressure from without. Occasions of temptation are inevitable and often take place when we least expect them. The moment of attack is where the battle for holiness is fiercest, but victory depends on more than how you fight when the battle is raging. How you prepare for the battle as well as how you respond to battles you have fought in the past are also critically important.

In Ephesians 6:10-12, Paul exhorts Christians to “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” If you and I are going to withstand temptation in the evil day, we will have to be strong in the Lord. That demands being prepared. It means taking up the whole armor of God. Do you recall the occasion when David was preparing to fight the Philistine giant, Goliath? Saul dressed David in his armor, but it would not work for David. Saul was already rejected by God. Taking up Saul’s armor amounted to placing confidence in one’s own strength and not trusting God. David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord. There is an armor that we should take into the daily battle, but we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, therefore we need to put on the whole armor of God. This is how we prepare for the evil day.

Ephesians 6:10-18 – Read

In the last session we examined the exhortation to prepare in verses 10-11, the reason to prepare in verse 12, the goal of preparation in verse 13; we began looking at how to prepare in verses 14 and following. We prepare by putting on the various components of the armor. We considered the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. Tonight we continue to give attention to the remaining parts of the armor.

1. The Third Article of Armor Is Shoes (15).

“As shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” I think we all know how important shoes can be. Shoes need a proper amount of grip to enhance our stability. Flexibility is also important as shoes that are too stiff can cause pain and inhibit movement. Readiness is the key factor in our spiritual shoes. You get the image of a sprinter’s shoe by the stress on readiness. A shoe in the spiritual armor of

God enables quickness, a necessary aspect of dealing with temptation. Flight is a fundamental reaction required for winning the battle with temptation. A quick and ready response to the experience of sinful desire is to scramble away from it. And it is not merely what one runs from but also what one runs after. The same readiness that should propel us away from sinful desires should also launch us in the direction of godly things. Paul counsels Timothy to “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace” (2 Timothy 2:22).

The key to the readiness of which Paul speaks is the “gospel of peace.” Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ is the message of the gospel. Peace with God means we have access to him and it means we will be glorified before him. Glory is where we are headed—to be transformed in the likeness of his moral beauty. Human joy is fueled by our peace with God. Once a sinner has had his eyes open to his guilt and the righteousness of the judgment of God against him, he treasures the peace he has with God through faith in Christ Jesus. The most torture we Christians experience is the loss of that peace through subsequent acts of sin. In addition since this gospel of peace points toward our glory with Christ, that glory becomes the tape at the end of the race. If we are intent on pursuing that glory, opportune times for the world, the flesh and the devil to strike will be few.

Let’s bring the metaphors down to practical everyday living. Putting the shoes of readiness on your feet requires living with a captivation of the reality and hope afforded by the gospel. Meditate much on Romans 5:1-2. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Grasp it. Own it. Live it. Cherish the peace and pursue the glory! It will make you ready to flee lusts and launch out after godliness.

2. The Fourth Article of Armor Is the Shield (16).

Even when you are cherishing peace with God and mindful of future glory, things happen. Suffering is a reality for us all. Satan will never roll over. Peter says, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Therefore, preparation for the evil day demands a shield. “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”

The solid wooden shield, about thirty inches wide and fifty inches tall, was covered with metal or leather. It protected the entire body from the shower of enemy arrows. (John

MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 358). Satan flings darts all of which are aimed at inciting unbelief and distrust of God. The dart he hurled at Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden came in the form of a serpent's suggestion that God was deceiving the couple. They could be wiser and more satisfied; they could be like God if they would disobey him.

Satan's MO has not changed. He his fiery darts always suggest a better way, a more satisfying way, a more pleasurable way than the way of God. The requirement for extinguishing these darts is faith. Faith is the conviction that God is true. It takes him at his word. MacArthur is right; "The only way to extinguish Satan's flaming missiles of temptation to doubt God is to *believe* God" (ibid., 359).

The time to take up the shield is ALWAYS—"in all circumstances." Carry the shield in every waking moment! This is the preparation needed for the evil day because the enemy is always firing and always looking for a time when the shield is down. Live constantly in the affirmation that the commands of the Lord are good and right and trustworthy. Believe and affirm and preach to yourself this truth: "The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).

3. The Fifth Article of Armor Is the Helmet (17a).

"Take the helmet of salvation." The helmet of the Romans soldier protected his head and his face. The assurance and security of the salvation of the believer are precious gifts from God. In order to stand strong in the power of God, we must stand strong in the assurance he affords us that we are his children, that we have been justified, that we shall be glorified. Doubt and discouragement are weapons used by the enemy to weaken Christ's followers and lend them to vulnerability to temptation. In the midst of discouragement and doubt, believers are more like to have an attitude of "what-does-it-matter-anyway." Knowing he will hold me fast and will not let me go are critical to being ready for the assault of temptation.

You put on the helmet of salvation by resting in the assurances of God's promises. He assures us that he knows we are but dust. He realizes we will struggle. While he does not excuse our sin, he will not let go. He even uses warnings to assure his people. They must not wallow in the slough of despondency. Putting on the helmet of salvation is going forth in the confidence and assurance afforded by God's grace. It refuses to listen to the voices that whisper how many are our failures and how little is our progress. Rather it holds tight to the promise of God's righteousness through faith and pursues a

path of confident obedience in light of it. This confidence does not persist willingly in sin; rather it forsakes sin because of the freedom God's work has brought.

4. The Sixth Article of the Armor is the Sword (17b).

"and [take] the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The Greek word used here is *machaira*. It was the everyday kept by Romans soldiers in a sheath attached to their belt. Like a gun in a holster, it was readily accessible for the need of the moment. Being prepared to withstand the evil day involves a ready-hand on the one aspect of readiness that is a weapon. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. The Bible is the sword given by the Spirit. It is a weapon. And it works defensively as well as offensively.

It defeats wrong ideas. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God."

Offensively, it exposes the inmost thoughts of human beings. Hebrews 4:12. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It instructs, it reproves, it corrects, and it trains. 2 Timothy 3:16. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

You take up the sword of the Spirit by reading, studying, memorizing, preaching, and meditating upon it, being careful to understand it accurately. Meditation upon the word feeds the soul, guides toward true prosperity, encourages, emboldens, and assures. (Psalm 1; Joshua 1:8-9) And just as surely as a soldier may wield a sword skillfully, the one who wields the word must do so skillfully as well (2 Timothy 2:15).

Conclusion

So this is armor that prepares you to stand when the evil day comes. Bind yourself with truth and sincerity. Pursue good works. Be running away from sin and pursuing godliness. Actively trust God. Rest in His gracious salvation. And take careful hold of his word.