

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are in the midst of discussing the Christian's Armor. In Ephesians 6:13 Paul commands us to "put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."¹ Now, we have discussed the first four pieces of armor: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace and the shield of faith. Dr. Spencer, I assume you want to move on to the fifth piece of armor?

Dr. Spencer: You assume correctly. Ephesians 6:17 starts by telling us to, "Take the helmet of salvation". Now, a helmet protects the most important part of our body, the head. The Rev. P.G. Mathew wrote that "This helmet consists of our salvation; to wear it speaks of our assurance of that salvation. How can anyone resist the devil when he is unsure of his own salvation? We are saved, we are being saved, and we shall be saved. The Spirit witnesses to our spirits that we are children of God. We are justified forever, and nothing in all creation can sever us from God's everlasting love."²

Marc Roby: It's interesting that Mathew equates our wearing of the helmet with our assurance of salvation.

Dr. Spencer: It is interesting, and I think it is completely right. A helmet will not help me in the battle if I don't have it on. It makes me think of the motorcycle riders you sometimes see riding along with no helmet on, but one clipped to the seat.

Marc Roby: Yes, that won't help them much in the case of an accident.

Dr. Spencer: No, it won't. Now, the analogy breaks down a bit of course in that if I am born again, but don't have assurance, my lack of assurance will not negate the fact that I am saved, God will still bring me to heaven. Nevertheless, a lack of assurance will significantly harm my ability to stand against my sinful nature, the devil and the world.

Paul also speaks of this helmet in one of his letters to the church in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 we read, "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." In this case, he refers to the hope of salvation as our helmet, which fits with Mathew's interpretation. If our hope, or assurance, in our salvation is strong, it is like having the helmet on. If it is weak, it is as though we have taken the helmet off.

Marc Roby: And this is part of the reason why we are commanded in a number of places to test our faith and make sure that we are true believers. For example, in John's first letter, he lists a

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² P.G. Mathew, *Power for Living – Part 3*, delivered Sunday, September 28, 2003 at Grace Valley Christian Center, available at <https://gracevalley.org/sermon/power-for-living-part-3/>

number of tests for our faith and, in 1 John 5:13 he tells us his purpose. He says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” In other words, to help us to develop the assurance of our faith.

Dr. Spencer: And Peter and Paul also thought assurance was important. In 2 Peter 1:10 we are told to make our calling and election sure. And in 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul commanded us, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” The Greek verbs examine and test are both present imperatives, they are commands that we are to continually obey. So, both Peter and Paul were eager to have us regularly examine ourselves and have assurance of salvation.

Marc Roby: Being confident of our salvation also leads to great joy, and the prophet Nehemiah told the people, in Nehemiah 8:10, that the joy of the Lord is their strength.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s a great point. And that brings us to the sixth, and final, piece of armor. Ephesians 6:17 in its entirety reads, “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Marc Roby: I remember that two weeks ago, in Session 221, you quoted the Rev. Mathew saying that the Word of God was central to all six pieces of armor.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true, and it is as we have seen. But Paul explicitly equates this final piece of armor, the sword of the Spirit, to the Word of God. And it has often been noted that this is the only offensive weapon listed in the armor of God. The Word of God functions both as a means to build us up in our faith to make us strong in defending ourselves and at the same time it is a weapon with which we can attack Satan.

Marc Roby: Sometimes offense is the best form of defense.

Dr. Spencer: I think that is exactly the idea here. But in order to use the Word of God as an offensive weapon, we obviously need to know it. We must study it carefully and prayerfully, we must listen to good sermons, read good books, and then practice using the Word on a daily basis to guide us in our decisions and to deflect the arrows of doubt and temptation as we noted in the context of the shield of faith.

Marc Roby: Certainly a sword, or any weapon, is not of much use if the soldier has never practiced using it.

Dr. Spencer: In fact, we can easily imagine someone who is unskilled being harmed by his own sword!

Marc Roby: That’s true, but I think maybe you’re in danger of stretching the analogy a bit too far there.

Dr. Spencer: You’re probably right. So, let’s move on and consider the classic example for the use of the sword of the Spirit. We see the strength of knowing and believing the Word displayed most clearly in Jesus’ responses to Satan’s temptations. After Jesus was baptized, we read in

Matthew 4:1-2 that “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

Marc Roby: Now, that has to be one of the all-time great understatements!

Dr. Spencer: I agree. He must have been famished beyond imagination. But Satan always strikes when we are in a weak place. And so, in Matthew 4:3 we are told that “The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’”

Marc Roby: And we are told in the next verse, Matthew 4:4, that Jesus responded by saying, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Dr. Spencer: Which is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus knew the Word of God and he believed it and he used it to deflect this arrow from Satan. The Word of God can be misinterpreted and misapplied and lead to all sorts of trouble. We need to know it well enough to know when someone is using it improperly and we need to be filled with and led by the Holy Spirit.

Marc Roby: Which Jesus most definitely was. And getting back to his encounter with Satan in the desert, the devil was not through with him after this first temptation.

Dr. Spencer: No, he wasn't. We read in Matthew 4:5-6, “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.””

Marc Roby: And now the devil himself is quoting Scripture! That quote comes from Psalm 91:11-12.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the devil will quote Scripture whenever he thinks it will help him. And it is safe to say that he knows Scripture very well. But we have the Holy Spirit to help us interpret and apply the Word of God to defeat the devil. And that is what we see Jesus doing.

In the next verse, Matthew 4:7, we again see Jesus correct Satan's misuse of the Word. We read that “Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.””” Satan was misapplying Scripture and Jesus corrected him by citing the appropriate verse. As we noted when we studied hermeneutics, which is the science of how to properly interpret Scripture, we must interpret every verse in a way that is consistent with all of Scripture.

Marc Roby: God does not lie and he cannot contradict himself. So, it stands to reason that his Word cannot contradict itself either.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. Satan went on to tempt Jesus again, but Jesus again deflected the flaming arrow of Satan by properly applying the Word of God. And there is a very clear lesson here for us. We need to know, understand and properly apply the Word of God to be able to win the spiritual battles that are sure to come our way in this life. Our faith has to have real content, it can't be the wishy-washy spiritual nonsense that is spewed out in many modern churches.

Singing over and over again that I love Jesus and he loves me will not enable me to stand against temptation. Knowing the Word of God, believing it and putting it into practice will. And the more we use it properly, the better we become at doing so. We will fall on occasion, but when we do, we must repent, move on, learn and apply the Word even better. And if you do that, you can become a battle-scarred veteran, able to stand in times of trial.

Marc Roby: I don't like the sound of being battle scarred, but at least such a veteran has survived the battle.

Dr. Spencer: And, as we noted some time ago, if we have been born again, God promises ultimate victory. But it is up to us to put in the hard work and make good use of the means of grace so that we can be victorious in the day-to-day battles, not just the ultimate war.

Marc Roby: Praise God that everyone whom God has chosen to save will, in fact, be saved. But how much better will it be for us if we lead the kind of victorious Christian life that God wants us to live.

Dr. Spencer: Paul wrote about this in his first letter to the church in Corinth, which was a very wicked city, filled with all kinds of immorality, like much of the United States today. In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 he gave the following warning for us all, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Marc Roby: Ouch! I don't like the idea of escaping through the flames.

Dr. Spencer: Nor do I. We can experience great pain in this life even if we are on our way to heaven. Therefore, we should be diligent in making use of the full armor of God. And that leads us to the last thing Paul says in this passage in Ephesians Six.

In Ephesians 6:18 Paul wrote, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

Marc Roby: Paul doesn't explicitly call prayer a part of our armor, but he clearly implies that the armor isn't something we just put on once and then assume it is automatically available to us.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right. As we have been endeavoring to make clear, we have work we must do every single day. God makes the means of grace available to us to help us lead victorious lives, but we still have a responsibility to diligently make use of them. A spiritually lazy Christian is in serious danger. If he is truly born again, he will be saved by God's power, but it may be through the flames as we read. And prayer is a very important means of grace. It is essential to every piece of the armor of God.

And the last statement of Paul's also makes clear the fact that we are all just part of a larger whole, which is the church, the body and bride of Christ.

Marc Roby: Well, you're obviously speaking about his statement that we should keep on praying for all the saints.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. We all need each other, even the strongest Christian you know needs other Christians. Paul immediately added, in Ephesians 6:19-20, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

Marc Roby: I can't think of a stronger Christian than the apostle Paul, so if he needed the prayers of others, it is safe to say that we all do.

Dr. Spencer: We do all need each other. And not just to pray for each other, but to help in other more tangible ways as well. I encourage our listeners to read 1 Corinthians Chapters 12 through 14 in one sitting. It is impossible to read those chapters and not see the fact that we are to function as members of God's church, not just individuals. Everything we do should be done in love, which is oriented toward others. All of our gifts and resources are for the common good, not for ourselves.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 that there are different gifts, different kinds of service and different kinds of work, but that it is the same triune God at work in all of them.

Marc Roby: You see the Trinity in those verses because Paul mentions the Spirit, the Lord and God the Father.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And then, in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 12:7, we are told, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Whatever gifts you have, whether they are speaking gifts, gifts of administration, service or whatever, they are manifestations of the Holy Spirit working in you and they are for the common good.

And so, in 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul writes, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." And then in Verse 18 he says, "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

Marc Roby: That makes it clear that we should never be jealous of the gifts God has given to others.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's true. We should seek to know and develop and use the gifts we have. There is nothing wrong with desiring greater gifts and working toward them to the extent we are able, but we must never neglect our own gifts or be jealous of the gifts of others. We have to work to see ourselves as part of the body, not as individuals. In 1 Corinthians 12:27 Paul tells us, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." In the Greek there is only one pronoun and it is plural, so you could translate that verse this way, "Now you *together* are the body of Christ and each one is a member."

Marc Roby: Thinking of ourselves as a part of a larger whole is not natural.

Dr. Spencer: No, it isn't. In our sinful nature we are all selfish. But Paul goes on to say that it is God who has appointed people to different positions in the church. And he then goes on to tell us how our gifts are to be used in 1 Corinthians Chapter Thirteen.

Marc Roby: Which is one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. It is often called the love chapter.

Dr. Spencer: And for good reason. In our society love is often thought of as just a feeling. It is self-focused. We talk about falling into love and falling out of love. But in the Bible, love can be commanded. It isn't a feeling. You don't fall into it or out of it. It is a firm determination to do what is best for others. And that chapter clearly tells us that you can have the greatest gifts imaginable, but if you don't have love, those gifts are useless.

And then, in Chapter Fourteen, the apostle makes the point that everything we do should be done for the edification, that is the building up, of the church.

Marc Roby: Another great statement about this is in Ephesians 4:11-13 where Paul wrote, "It was he", referring to Jesus Christ, "who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful statement communicating the same idea. And so, in concluding our discussion about the armor of God, I want to encourage all of our listeners to be active members of a good church and to view themselves as a part of the body of Christ. Let's work together to glorify our great God by living holy, victorious Christian lives and sharing the gospel with this broken world. We are to be Christian soldiers, a part of God's army. You've never heard of an army of one. So, let me conclude by quoting the old hymn and saying, Onward Christian Soldiers!

Marc Roby: I can add my amen to that statement. And let me close by reminding our listeners that they can send questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We will do our best to respond.