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ARMOR

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GOD

{*Suiting Up for Spiritual Battle*}

BY GREG LAURIE

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Have you ever been humming along nicely as a Christian—even doing a little better than you had ever done—and feeling good, when suddenly you were barraged with all kinds of temptations and attacks, trials and difficulties? You thought to yourself, “What is going on? Have I committed some spiritual sin to deserve all of this?”

It is called spiritual warfare. And you are in the heat of the battle.

Sometimes we want it all to stop. We are looking for some comfortable little foxhole to dive into and wait the battle out. You need to know that you don’t have to be a sitting duck for Satan’s attacks. There are clear steps that you can take as a believer in order to move forward and counterattack spiritually in this battle. But before we take one step on the battlefield, we need to get dressed like we are going to war.

Ephesians 6:10–18 tells us,

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

We are called to put on the full armor of God. It is not for us to pick and choose what pieces of armor we want (or don’t want) to wear. We are not to say, “I like the breastplate and I definitely want the sword and the shield, but I hate helmets. I don’t need a helmet here,” or “I don’t need a

breastplate there. I don't need to have my sword in this particular situation." We need to wear every single piece.

Each part of the armor is important. Otherwise, God would not have mentioned it. Without your full armor on, you are a target and you will go down fast. Why? Because in the very area you may think you are the strongest, you may one day turn out to be weak and vulnerable. This often happens in the area of our lives that we feel we have under control. Always be careful of boasting about something you feel strongest in. The devil is saying, "Oh yeah? Is that a challenge?" The Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

It comes down to this: an unguarded strength can become a double weakness—because when you think you are strong in any area, you will begin to lower your defenses. You can even be brought down by little things.

Have you ever noticed that when the great men and women of the Bible sinned, they always seemed to fall in the area of their greatest strength? Think of Abraham, Moses, or Peter. Abraham was described as a man of faith, but he had lapses in faith. We know that he asked his beautiful wife Sarah to lie and say that she was his sister because he was afraid that she would be taken away from him and he would be killed in the process. Here is Abraham, known for great faith, who fell in the area of his strength when his faith was lacking.

Then there was Moses, described in the Bible as the most humble man on the face of the earth (see Numbers 12:3). Yet there is an occasion in the Bible where he lost his temper and struck a rock that God had specifically told him to speak to. Then he personally took credit for what God had done, incurring God's wrath—resulting in him not entering into the Promised Land (see Numbers 20:7–12).

And then there was Peter, who was known for his great courage. After all, he was one of the first men to publicly follow Jesus Christ and lay it all on the line for the Lord. But in the Upper Room, he underestimated his own weakness when he said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you." He was flatly contradicting what Jesus had said: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times" (see Mathew 26:34–35).

Even if there is an area of your life that you think you could never fall in, remind yourself every day to put on your entire armor, so you will not be vulnerable in that area or any other. Put on the whole armor of God.

## BELT OF TRUTH

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth...”

Paul starts with a piece of armor that may seem insignificant to us: the belt of truth. On a Roman soldier’s belt was a sheath where his sword was kept. Also attached to his belt was his breastplate, made of leather or metal, protecting his vital organs. All of these things were hinged onto the belt. You say, “Fine, but what does that mean to me?” Each one of these pieces of armor or equipment speaks to something in your Christian life as you are engaged in a spiritual battle.

The belt of truth represents a life and a mind that is pulled together and ready to serve for the glory of God. It speaks of having truth on the inside. It speaks of integrity.

One definition of integrity is: what you are when nobody is looking. It is one thing to appear a certain way in public, in church, or among other people. But what are you like when you are all by yourself—when there is nobody in the room with you—that is what you really are. That speaks of your integrity or lack thereof. This is the idea that David expresses in Psalm 51:6: “You desire truth in the inward parts.”

The opposite of integrity is duplicity. Duplicity is hypocrisy. This speaks of a person who is trying to live a double life.

First and foremost in our Christian experience, we need truth. We need to be what we say we are, privately as well as publicly. If this area is lacking, then all of the other pieces of armor become somewhat irrelevant. You can have your breastplate, your sheath for your sword, but if your belt is falling off (in other words, if you don’t have truth in the core of your being), then you are going to be worthless on the battlefield. You will be worthless and immobilized because you are trying to live in two worlds.

## BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Having put on the breastplate of righteousness...”

Directly connected to the belt of truth is the element protecting your vital organs. The breastplate for the Roman soldier would be like our modern equivalent of a bulletproof vest that police officers or soldiers wear.

While we want protect our arms or legs from harm, the fact of the matter is, if in battle you lost an arm or a leg during hand-to-hand combat, you could live without them. But you won't live very long without your heart or without your internal organs. Thus, the breastplate is essential.

What does this say to us? The righteousness that God is telling us to put on, which protects our vital organs and is essential for our spiritual survival, speaks of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. You can call it imputed righteousness or positional righteousness, because it describes how God sees Christ when He looks at us. You might say, “Me? Righteous? I don't think so.” You doubt it because you know yourself. Sometimes we don't behave as righteously as we ought to, but we are righteous before God—not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us.

His righteousness is given to me, and not obtained through what I do for Him. Here is where the twist comes in. Sometimes I will think that if I am doing fairly well, I can approach God. Let's say that you had a good week. You read your Bible every day. You have gone to a couple of midweek services at church. You remembered to pray. You feel pretty strong spiritually. But then you lower your guard. You get hit spiritually and you fall. Now, because you've fallen, you feel guilty and stop reading as much. You stop going to church and you stop praying, all because you fell short.

At times like these you are vulnerable because you are relying on a breastplate of *self*-righteousness. That would be like going into battle with a breastplate made out of Styrofoam. You don't want to wear a breastplate of Styrofoam. You want God's righteousness. When we have sinned, Satan is standing right in front of God, saying, “This guy has blown it. Finish him off.”

The devil wants you to feel guilty and condemned. He wants you to experience regret and remorse but not repentance. He wants to keep you away from God. That is his strategy. But when the Spirit of God convicts you, He uses the Word of God in love, seeking to bring you back into fellowship with your heavenly Father.

When the devil says you are not worthy to approach God, that is where the breastplate of righteousness comes in. It is a lie. You are worthy to approach God because of what Christ has accomplished. So get into fellowship with God and stay there—keep that breastplate on.

## SHOES OF PEACE

“And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace...”

In Paul’s day, the Roman soldiers wore sandals that had hobnails or cleats on the bottom to give them firm-footedness. It is a picture that speaks of someone who can dig in and hold their ground.

When I know that my relationship with God is right, and I am not subject to my personal moods or whims, it is very reassuring. It gives me a security and a firm foundation to build my life upon.

These sandals do something else. They give soldiers mobility so they can move forward on the field of battle. The word *preparation* in “the preparation of the gospel of peace” could also be translated “readiness.” It is the idea of being ready and willing to move at a moment’s notice. As a soldier under the command of Jesus Christ, the Bible tells me that I am to be on duty at all times. I should always be alert, ready, and looking for opportunities to share the gospel.

I have found that some of the greatest doors God has opened to me have come when I have least expected them, not when I am out looking for them. It’s not when we are on “soul patrol,” looking for people to convert. More often it will be during some common occurrence, when you are just out doing whatever you do. Maybe you are pumping gas or at the grocery store. Someone will come into your path or be seated next to you on an

airplane. You'll run into them and have a quick conversation. Then the door opens to share the gospel.

The soldier is poised and ready. They have the sandals strapped on so they can move forward and rise to the occasion.

## SHIELD OF FAITH

“Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”

The words *above all* mean that faith is of paramount importance. In other words, the other pieces of armor that we are looking at won't work without faith. The Bible says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible also says, “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). All of this is activated by our faith in what God says.

The shield is a defensive piece of armor, used to deflect fiery darts or flaming arrows. This refers to one of the most commonly used enemy tactics of the day. As the Roman army would go against their enemy, flaming arrows often would barrage them and they returned in kind. These arrows were dipped in pitch or a tar-like material, lit, and then fired. They would fire thousands and thousands of arrows. The objective of this barrage of flaming arrows was to demoralize and confuse the adversary. The Roman soldier would pull up his shield to protect himself from these arrows. The preliminary attacks always occurred before the enemy came into direct contact with you. The objective was: let's kill as many of our enemy with the arrows first and then we will go in for hand-to-hand combat.

In the same way, Satan has arrows that he fires at you. Satan's flaming arrows are swift and silent. We don't receive advanced warning of their arrival. They just come unexpectedly and usually at times when we are vulnerable. When you get up in the morning, before your feet have even hit the floor, all of a sudden you are barraged with these strange, maybe impure thoughts. Maybe a thought of hatred, or thoughts of terror or fear.



“What if this happens? What if that happens?” You even feel a little guilty about it.

Then of course, the devil, who is the accuser of the brethren, moves in for the kill and says, “How could you think about something like that first thing in the morning? What is wrong with you? What kind of a Christian do you think you are, anyway?”

This is a very clever strategy, isn't it? First, he fires the arrow and then he condemns us for being hit by it. But we must understand that this is an enemy attack.

If those thoughts come and you say, “I resist that in the name of Jesus Christ. That is nothing more than a fiery dart, a flaming arrow. I am not going to entertain it nor am I going to feel condemned for being tempted with it,” then you have pinpointed what it was and effectively resisted it. You used the shield of faith. If you base your Christian life on your fluctuating emotions, you will be defeated quickly. There are going to be times when you don't “feel” God. There are going to be times when you don't feel that great. It is then that you take God at His Word, you apply faith toward it, and you believe it.

Satan will try to get you to doubt God. That was really his initial temptation to Adam and Eve in the Garden (see Genesis 3:1–4). “Did God really say what you thought He said? Has God said that you shall not eat of every tree in the garden? God knows in the day that you eat thereof you will be as gods, knowing good and evil. God is not on the level with you, Eve. He is holding something back from you. Doubt Him.” It is a flaming arrow.

It is then that we should come back to faith and to what God has said in His promises to us. As long as you believe God, the shield is up. When you believe Satan's lies, your shield comes down.

That is why 1 John 5:4 says, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (NIV).

Not only does the shield of faith protect the soldier, but it also is something that he uses with other soldiers to move forward as a unit.

An interesting thing about the shields that the Romans used is that they were beveled on the edge. This meant that they could be interconnected together like pieces of a puzzle in the field of battle. The Roman soldiers would move as a unit with a particular strategy. They would get to a certain point and they would see the enemy poised. Together, all of the soldiers would crouch down and pull their shields in. They would pull their shields in front of them, beside them, behind them, and even on top. They became an armored shelter. The arrows would descend and hit the shields, but the soldiers would be protected.

The idea is that we need to lock shields with our fellow soldiers. You don't want to be out there as "Joe Solo Christian" when the flaming arrows hit. You cannot cover all sides with one shield, as large as it may be. But if you can get together with me, and we can pull together our shields with those Christians over there, we can all bolster and strengthen one another. We can hold one another up. Two are more effective than one. And three are even more effective. That is why when you are being hit with a barrage of enemy arrows, you need to run—not walk—to church and get with your fellow believers.

Walk forward with your shield of faith up!

## HELMET OF SALVATION

"And take the helmet of salvation..."

In combat, the two most sought after and vulnerable targets are the heart and the head. You just hope that your opponent is not wearing a breastplate. One blow to the heart and he is gone. Or, if he is not wearing his helmet, you lop his head off. That is the goal. And if you have your helmet and your breastplate on, the enemy's attacks are repelled.

We have our breastplate of righteousness intact, knowing where we stand with God, but we have to keep our helmet on as well.

I know that people don't like to wear helmets. I ride a Harley Davidson, and I have to wear a helmet because it is the law. But I hate helmets because it is more fun to ride without one—it is also extremely dangerous.

There are some that say, “You can’t hear with a helmet,” or “It hinders your movement.” Possibly, but a helmet can save your life if you are thrown from a motorcycle or skateboard, or whatever extreme sport vehicle it is that you are using. Helmets are important. We need to have our helmets on.

In spiritual battle, the helmet is symbolic of protecting one’s mind, which is Command Central. Most temptation comes in the realm of your thoughts. Proverbs 23:7 says, “As he thinks in his heart, so is he.” Satan recognizes the value of first getting a foothold in one’s thoughts and imagination, because this will prepare the way for a thought to translate into action.

It has been said, “Sow a thought and reap an act. Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny.” It starts with a thought.

Jesus really blew the cover off the Pharisees in the Sermon on the Mount. Their minds were filled with all kinds of impure thoughts. They prided themselves on the fact that they did not do certain sins. He would say to them, “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery” (Matthew 5:27–28 NLT). Jesus was saying that sin is not merely a matter of actions and deeds. It is something within the heart. It is something that starts in the mind and ultimately leads to action. Sin deceives me into thinking that because I have not done the actual act, I am all right. As long as I don’t do it, it is OK. If I just think about it, if I just fantasize about it, if I just toy around with it, it’s fine.

But it is not enough to just *not do* the deed. You have to stop thinking about it. Stop wanting it. Otherwise it is only a matter of time until that thought translates into an action.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4–5, we read, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Too many people today are empty-headed, allowing any influence to enter their minds. The only way to really protect against ungodly influences is to

fill your mind with the things of the Lord. That is why Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (NIV).

Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

That brings us to the last piece in our spiritual armament. The only weapon that is both defensive and offensive.

## THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

“And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

When you go into battle against your enemy and it is time for hand-to-hand combat, you are past the flaming arrows. You are past the distance where you throw spears. What are you going to do? Are you going to throw your helmet at him? Are you going to pull your belt off? “Get back! I have a belt here and I have a license to use it.” How about beat them to death with your sandal? No, you need the sandal to hold your ground. You need the belt to hold things together. You need your breastplate to protect your vital organs and your helmet to protect your head. You have your shield on your arm to deflect the blows of the enemy. Now it is time to pull the sword out of the sheath and get serious. It is time to hurt the enemy. It is time to strike back.

The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is both defensive and offensive. It blocks attacks, but it strikes as well.

A lot of believers have their entire armor in place but never use their sword. They keep it in the sheath. They talk about it and study it. They even compare swords with others. But they never actually utilize their

sword in spiritual battle. The devil knows too well the power and authority of the Bible. And he will try to keep you from using it at all costs.

Whether we know it or not, Satan fears that sword. He knows the value of it. He knows the power of it. He will do everything He can to cause us to keep our swords sheathed so we don't strike him with it.

Notice that it is the sword of the Spirit. It is not just the Word. It is the Word activated by the Spirit. You can read the Bible and get absolutely nothing out of it. The Bible says that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14). I remember that before I was a Christian I read portions of the Bible and it was largely meaningless to me. It didn't make any sense. It didn't penetrate my mind. After I became a Christian, it became so alive to me. I remember reading it for the first time as a believer and understanding principles that were new to me. It would change my life, as I discovered new principles each and every day about how to live the Christian life.

When you get the sword out, and know how it applies to the situation, that is utilizing the Word activated by the Spirit.

Jesus showed us how to do this when He was tempted in the wilderness. He had been fasting for forty days and nights. The devil came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (see Matthew 4:3). Jesus was, is, and always will be God. He could have utilized executive privilege and said, "Get out of here, Satan." Satan would have fled at His command. Instead, Jesus occupied ground that we can also occupy. In other words, He provided for us a model on how to effectively deflect temptation using the sword of the Spirit. What did Jesus say? "It is written, 'Man should not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Satan shows Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world and says, "These are mine and I can give them to whomever I choose to give them to. I will give them to you if you will worship me right now." Jesus says, "It is written, 'Thou shall worship the Lord God and Him only shall you serve.'"

Satan then gets a little cleverer and he quotes Scripture himself. He essentially tells Jesus, "Go over to this high point of the temple and it is written that His angels will catch you." But Jesus says, "It is written, 'You

shall not tempt the Lord your God.” The Word of God, memorized and properly applied.

This is why you need to memorize Scripture. Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” It is nice to keep a Bible in your briefcase or purse, but the best place to hide the Word of God is in your heart. Commit it to memory.

By the way, what shape is your sword in? Is it polished from daily use, as you study the Scriptures on a regular basis? Is it sharpened on the anvil of experience, as you have applied and obeyed its truth in your life? Or is it rusty from a lack of use and preparation? If you neglect the study of Scripture, your spiritual life will ultimately unravel. Everything you need to know about God is found in the Bible. Use it and follow the example of Jesus.

Here is how to use the sword of the Spirit: Satan comes and says that you are wrong and that God condemns you. Your response? *It is written, Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Satan comes back and says that God doesn’t hear your prayers. *That is wrong! It is written in 1 John 5:14, “This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”*

Satan whispers in your ear that you are not going to make it. You will fall again. *It is written in John 10:28, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” It is also written in Philippians 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ.”*

Satan says, “Be afraid. Be terrified.” *No. It is written in Psalm 27:1, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

You find the relevant scripture to the given situation and you use it. It is the sword of the Spirit.

What if someone says that they don’t believe the Bible? Should you still quote it? Of course! It is still the Word of God. It is still alive and powerful. I am not suggesting that we go out and beat people with our sword. Let’s also think of it as a scalpel to do delicate surgery. The idea is that the sword is still sharp whether a person believes in it or not.

We need the Word, but we also need prayer. The Word of God and prayer are inseparable. The Word enlightens us. Prayer enables us. The Word of God reveals the will of God. Prayer enables us to do His will.

## **SUIT UP!**

God wants to use you. It is time to suit up. It is time to realize that you are a soldier under orders. Put on the belt of truth, and hinge the breastplate of righteousness onto it. Shoe your feet with the gospel of peace to stand your ground. Hold up the shield of faith to deflect the fiery darts the enemy sends your way. Put on the helmet of salvation to protect your mind, and use the sword of the Spirit to defend yourself in battle. Each piece is important. Let's make sure that we equip ourselves with the whole armor, because the spiritual battle is raging.