

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: May 19, 2019

Love As A Defense

By Dan Trygg

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness...”
Ephesians 6:12-14

“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should seize you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”
1 Thessalonians 5:1-8

There are two places in Paul’s letters where he refers to “putting on” a breastplate. I think most of us are more familiar with the oft-quoted passage from Ephesians 6. Clearly, *that* context is about spiritual warfare, ...standing firm against the assaults and attacks of spiritual forces of wickedness.

Paul uses the armor of a typical Roman foot soldier to illustrate how we must be vigilant, and prepared for the spiritual opposition we must deal with. Warfare in those days was not at all like warfare today. The Roman army was the most powerful military force on the planet, at that time. They were highly organized and disciplined. Instead of individuals charging down field, *they were organized into units that worked together as a team*. Aside from the use of chariots and cavalry, which would try to disrupt the advance of infantrymen of the opposing side, the infantryman had to deal with airborne darts, arrows, or rocks, and the close-quarter assaults of their enemy, when the opposing armies were close enough for hand-to-hand combat. **A key part of their survival, and success, had to do with their equipment, which was designed to ward off the arrows and blows of the enemy.** For example, their shields were quite large (2’x 4’), offering “door-sized” protection (their name, *thureon*, is a derivative from the word for “door”, *thura*), designed to virtually cover their entire bodies. They were rounded, wrap-around in shape to ward off the blows and arrows that would be directed against them. Roman infantrymen were not equipped or primarily trained to fight as individuals. Their specialty was to fight as a coordinated unit, called a *phalanx*. The soldiers linked together to make a “tortoise shell” of shields, and moved down the field as a unit. These large shields were not designed for rapid movement, or close-quarter combat. The soldiers were well-protected behind their large shields, and used spears to keep the enemy at bay, as they moved down the field. People within the unit had different responsibilities and functions to carry out.

In spite of the protection that the “door shields” offered, a typical soldier also wore personal body armor. Arrows or blows of some sort would still, at times, make it through the wall of shields, or the unit might falter and break apart, or he might be caught alone, away from his unit. Then, **the soldier needed a second, closer layer of protection. This would include a helmet, arm pieces and greaves for the limbs, and a breastplate to cover one’s shoulders and core.** The breastplate was really two pieces, ...one plate for the front, and another for the back..., joined together to protect the body, front and back. **No matter how good the unit might be, there was always a need for personal protection.**

In Ephesians 6, Paul refers to this piece of the armor as the “breastplate of righteousness”. As mentioned above, that context is about spiritual warfare, dealing with demonic forces who oppose and attack us. **The name, “Satan” is transliterated from the Hebrew, and means “adversary, opponent, one who tries to block or oppose what we do.”** In this sense, *all the evil powers which Paul mentions (“rulers, authorities, world-powers of this darkness, the spiritual-things of evil in the heavens”)* are in opposition to us. We are at war with all of them, at whatever level we might have cause to encounter them, or their influence. **The word, “devil” (Gk., *diabolos*) mean “slanderer”, and refers to the enemy’s main avenue of attack. He attempts to accuse us to our own consciences, and also to each other, ...to cause guilt, shame, doubt, confusion, depression, hostility, anger, divisiveness, and the like.** When we are preoccupied with such thoughts and emotions, we are not only distracted and weakened, but we can even be set against each other. **With our focus turned inward, we easily give up the fight, or are distracted from our true Source of strength, and the enemy can run all over us.** We need the protection offered by the “shield of faith” and the other parts of our armor, or we would be easily wounded, and taken out of the fight.

What does Paul tell us? **“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might”** (Eph. 6:10). **The enemy will attempt to attack us right there, ...he will attempt to confuse, cloud or block our relationship with God, so that we are cut off from our Source of power and authority.** In 2 Corinthians 10:4,5, Paul says that the weapons of our warfare are for the “pulling down of strongholds (fortified places)”. The next phrase gives more clarification to this word picture of physical warfare. Paul goes on to say that these weapons are for the tearing-down of “reasonings (arguments) and every lofty-thing rising up against the experiential knowledge of God”. **So, the attack of the enemy is against our experience of God.** The shield of faith is to ward off the lies of the enemy that would cause us to doubt God’s love, or the message of the gospel. **The breastplate in this context is the covering of Christ’s righteousness. This is the second, closer level of protection.** No matter how the enemy would attempt to accuse us, the righteousness which Christ purchased *for* us, and *gave to us* as a gift, is the protective covering to protect our vital inner parts. **The enemy’s slanderous lies, and curses, cannot penetrate the covering of Christ’s righteousness, as long as we understand that this righteousness is based upon what Jesus did for us** (not about our own performance), **and that it is given to us as a gift.** We can stand strong in *His* righteousness, even when we still have *our own* struggles, because we are saved by grace.

What about the breastplate of faith and love in 1 Thessalonians 5:8? The issue there is a bit different. There is no mention of a direct frontal attack by opposing forces. **Here, the danger is a subtle deception, a lack of clarity and alertness, so that a person would become lax, unfocused and unaware of what was really going on, from a spiritual perspective.** The danger was to be caught up with the general blindness, slumber and unconcern of this age, and to be drawn into the mindless pursuit of drunkenness, entertainment and pleasure, which so many others are living for. **Here, the breastplate is not to protect us from the aggressive attacks of negativity and accusation. Instead, we need to have our hearts and vitals protected from distracted, deceptive thinking and living.**

How does this work? Note that there are two aspects to this breastplate: both faith and agapē-love. Both qualities are important to protect our hearts, and to keep us from succumbing to the very real danger of the mindset of the world around us.

FAITH keeps our thinking clear. Faith keeps our focus on the truth of God’s Word, at a time when the world is departing farther and farther away from following God. Faith is the assured commitment to the truth of the Good News we have believed in. When others are being lulled to sleep, and drawn away after various lusts and distractions, faith keeps us looking to the eternal truth revealed by God. **Faith keeps us clear and sober-minded in a time of confusion and disorientation.** Because of faith, we know a broader, fuller picture than what others see or hold to, and we choose to embrace that faith-perspective as the truth we live by. **Clear thinking also helps to keep our hearts clear and untainted from the temptations of the world. Instead of living for immediate pleasure, faith instructs us to live for an eternal inheritance.**

AGAPĒ-LOVE keeps our hearts engaged. More than just keeping our own thinking clear about eternity, so that we ourselves live in obedience to God, **agapē-love motivates us to continue to live to serve others.** It keeps us choosing to live graciously and sacrificially in order to benefit and help those in need. **It causes us to continue to reach out to the world around us, when it may be easier to simply keep to ourselves.** Just as God’s *agapē-love* motivated Him to give His very best for us, sending Jesus to come and give Himself on our behalf, in the same way, **the agapē of God in us will drive us to share that Good News with those who do not know.** Paul wrote, “for the *agapē-love* of Christ *compels* us, having concluded this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf. ...Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were appealing through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:14,15,20). **The agapē-love of God guards our hearts from becoming hard and disinterested, or withdrawing when we are rejected.**

Our clear, sober-minded thinking is the result of having put on the breastplate of both faith and love. We need *both* aspects to keep from becoming compromised by the lawlessness and deception of our age. We are to be sober, not in the sense of being legalistic or condemnatory. **Our inner heart must remain both clear and kind.** The combination of faith and love will protect our vision for serving God *and* serving others. **In a cold-hearted world, the breastplate of faith and love will keep our hearts warm and soft, both toward God and those around us.** In a culture that is focused on the immediate, **the heart-protection of faith and love will help us to remain focused on both aspects of eternity: Living to God, and living to help others come to know God.**

In Revelation 12:11, it mentions that we can overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb (the breastplate of righteousness), by the word of our testimony (standing strong in our personal trust in Jesus, ...our faith), and by not loving our lives, even to death (loving Jesus and others *more*). **The breastplate of righteousness, faith and agapē-love can make our hearts impenetrable, so that we can stand strong in the evil day.**