

DEFENSE AGAINST DEFEAT, Part 3

by Ray C. Stedman

We are now embarked upon an attempt to explain life. We want to see why men are so bewildered at what is happening in the world about them, and why they are so impotent in solving the great problems which have confronted men for many centuries. Why is it we seemingly made no progress in this intense struggle that is our life? Our attention now is focused upon one verse of Scripture, Ephesians 6:17, which occurs in the midst of a great call to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," {Eph 6:10}. The apostle concludes the list of "the armor of God" {Eph 6:11} with this verse:

**And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.
{Eph 6:17}**

We are examining this battle of the Christian against "the world rulers of present darkness" {Eph 6:12}, as Paul so very eloquently describes them. We are contending, the apostle says, against the great cunning of the devil, the clever ruses and subtle stratagems by which he

- Weakens our faith,
- Lowers our morals, and
- Neutralizes our witness.

Many have said to me since this series began, "I never realized before that all this had to do with my life, that this had been happening to me all along."

A number have said, "I never knew what it really meant to face the wiles of the devil, or what were these fiery darts of the wicked one."

I am glad we have come to understand that this is not at all remote from us, but it is a battle we are engaged in every moment of every day. Once we have understood something about the form of attack by which the devil accomplishes his work in mankind, we immediately become interested in discovering how we can meet it. It is, therefore, necessary that we give our attention to what the apostle has to say about the armor of God.

Though the defense of the Christian is couched in figurative language, it is a description of something very real. It is not an automatic procedure which we experience, but an intelligent program we are expected to follow.

I hope this is clear because it is very important.

We are not to struggle through the Christian life blindly, hoping for the best. If we do that we have already succumbed to the wiles of the devil. No wonder then that we are defeated by constant frustration, confusion, discouragement, uncertainty, and all the other manifestations of the devil's work. We are expected to give intelligent consideration to the process of overcoming, and to learning how to counteract the attacks of Satan in our lives. It is the armor of God which sets this forth.

If we do not bother to use the armor, we need not wonder that we succumb to the wiles of the devil, for this is the only thing that can possibly meet the subtlety, the cunning, the wiliness of the attacks of Satan against us. As we have seen, no degree of human intelligence is equal to the cunning of Satan.

The devil, throughout the centuries, has beaten every man who pits his strength against him. The record of Scripture is that even the greatest of saints, those who have seen clearest and understood most of the reality of life, in trying to meet the devil in their own strength have always been whipped. There is no man who is able to stand against him.

As Martin Luther put it, "On earth is not his equal."

But we have been provided with an armor, and this armor is perfectly adequate to meet the ruses, the cunning, and the wiliness of the devil.

We must understand what that armor means. We have seen that it is a figurative explanation of Jesus Christ and what Christ is to us.

If you would like it put a different way, this armor is an expansion of Jesus' words in John 14:20, "you in me, and I in you." Those are some of the simplest words in the English language. Any child can understand them. They are monosyllables, yet they encompass a truth so profound that I question if anyone ever remotely apprehends all that is involved in these simple words.

The first three pieces of this armor that Paul describes,

- Girding your loins with the girdle of truth,
- Putting on the breastplate of righteousness, and
- Having your feet shod with the equipment of the gospel of peace

are a figurative way of explaining or expounding the phrase, "you in me," i.e., the Christian in Christ. When we came to Jesus Christ and believed in him, we were "in Christ," we had a different basis of living. As the Bible says, those who do this are "transferred, translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God," {cf, Col 1:13}. We are said to be "in Christ," and have found Christ to be the ground of truth, i.e., the key to life. He is the secret of the universe -- all truth relates to him, all truth comes from him. By him all things were made and exist, and there is no explanation of reality except that which leads ultimately to the figure and person of Jesus Christ. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," {Col 2:3}.

Then, further, we found that we are invited by God to rest upon Christ's righteousness. We do not come before God on the ground of our own puny efforts to have done good, or to have behaved ourselves, or to have pleased him. We stand in Christ's righteousness and his perfections are imputed to us. In the amazing experience of the cross, God has transferred our sin to him and transferred his righteousness to us. This is the ground of our acceptance before God and the answer to the problem of human guilt from which we all suffer. Then we learned that Christ is our peace. He is the source of our sense of calmness, of quietness, of euphoria, of well-being. He is the ground of our morale. Those are the first three pieces of the armor. We have put on these if we are Christians at all, and we begin our defense against the devil and his wiles by reminding ourselves of these great facts.

The last three pieces of this armor describe what it means for Christ to be in the Christian, i.e., Christ appropriated, applied to actual life. These three pieces are very practical and highly important to us. In our last message we saw what it means to take "the shield of faith, wherewith we are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one," {Eph 6:17}. We saw that taking the shield of faith means to come to practical conclusions from the ground on which we are standing in Christ, which we have taken in him. That is, if Christ is the truth, if Christ is our righteousness, if Jesus Christ is our peace, then this and this is true, and that and that is not true. Thinking it through, we come to a "therefore." We draw a practical conclusion and thus answer the thoughts which arise within us which tempt us to doubt, or lust, or immorality, weakness, confusion, or uncertainty. Thus we resist the devil.

We saw that the shield of faith is supremely important. It is adequate in itself to defeat all the fiery darts of the wicked one. The reason we so often experience weakness is that we do not actually take it. We continually try to muddle through. We do not do intelligently what God says and apply the shield of faith, i.e., think this thing through from the ground of faith we have taken.

There are only two pieces of the armor left -- the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. We must examine what is meant by this phrase, "the helmet of salvation."

The figure of a helmet immediately suggests to us that this is something designed to protect the mind, the intelligence, the ability to think and reason.

We saw that the breastplate was the protection of our emotional life. When you figuratively put on Christ as your breastplate of righteousness, you are assuming a position in him which protects you from the sense of guilt and unforgiveness -- the most common ground of disturbance to the emotions. It is because we feel guilty that we get emotionally upset and depressed, and the breastplate protects us there. The shoes, as we have already seen, protect us in the area of our will. The shoes of the gospel of peace (Christ as our peace) create a readiness and willingness within us. It is our motivations which are dealt with here. Christ as our peace motivates us and makes us ready to face life.

But the helmet is designed for the head, for the intelligence, the mind. If we follow through consistently in our application of these pieces, we will discover that this is something Christ is doing in us, and through us, in the world. This helmet can keep our thinking straight and preserve us from mental confusion and darkness.

Stop a minute here.

I would like to ask you this: As you look at the world in which we are living, is there anything more desperately needed than this? Is there anything which could possibly be more relevant to the situation in which we find ourselves than this factor which will keep us thinking straight? Was there ever a time when men were more frankly bewildered than they are in our day, or when statesmen were more openly confused and honestly admitting it? The intelligentsia confess being utterly baffled in dealing with the problems with which human society is confronted.

A woman said to me last week, "I don't know what to believe about Vietnam. I don't know how to determine whether we should be there or not. I just don't know what to believe."

Her uncertainty and bewilderment are echoed by millions today. Even those who take sides on these issues do so largely for emotional reasons. They are unable to give clear, logical arguments as to why they believe what they do. And what about the other issues of our day -- birth control, race relations, crime and delinquency, moral decay, disarmament, and teeming misery of our vast city slums? The mind is simply staggered by the complexities and insolubilities of the problems which face human lives. No wonder H. G. Wells wrote at the close of World War II:

Quite apart from any bodily depression, the spectacle of evil in the world -- the wanton destruction of homes, the ruthless hounding of decent folk into exile, the bombings of open cities, the cold-blooded massacres and mutilations of children and defenseless gentle folk, the rapes and filthy humiliations, and above all, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment and fear, to a world from which such things had seemed well-nigh banished -- all these have come near to breaking my spirit altogether.

He went on from that point to write his last book, *Mind At the End of Its Tether*.

Listen to this startling statement by George Bernard Shaw, renowned in the world as a freethinker and liberal philosopher. In his last writings he says:

The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led instead directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith.

What a revealing confession of mental confusion and darkness by some of the great leaders of thought in our day! There is no protection in the world for the mind.

But the Christian has the helmet of salvation. What is this helmet, this protection, which keeps our thinking straight in the midst of a very confused world? Paul answers in one word -- it is the helmet of satisfaction. He is not talking about the salvation of the soul. He is not referring to salvation as regeneration or conversion. In

other words, he is not looking back at all. He is not speaking of salvation as a past decision which was once made, or even as a present experience, but he is looking on to the future. He is talking about a salvation which will be a future event. It is exactly what he is referring to in Romans, the 13th chapter, when he says, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed," {Rom 13:11KJV}.

This helmet is further defined for us by the apostle in his first letter to the Thessalonians, in Chapter 5:

But since we belong to the day [i.e., we Christians], let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. {1 Th 5:8 RSV}

Here, salvation is a hope, something yet in the future, something as yet not possessed or entered into fully. This future tense of salvation is described for us in a number of passages, but very plainly and fully in Romans 8:18-25, and especially in Verses 22-25:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. {Rom 8:22-25 RSV}

Paul is talking about the day of resurrection, the day of the coming again of Christ, the day when creation will be delivered from its bondage, when Christ returns to establish his kingdom. This helmet, therefore, is the recognition that all human schemes to obtain world peace and harmony are doomed to fail. But, through these failures, Jesus Christ is working out his own plan which will culminate in his appearing again and the establishment of his own reign in righteousness on the earth. That is the helmet of salvation which will keep your thinking straight in the hour of man's utter confusion and darkness.

The principle of God's working is declared over and over again in Scripture. It is written for all to read. "No flesh," God says, "shall glory in my presence," {cf, 1 Cor 1:29 KJV}. In other words, nothing that man can boast of shall contribute one iota to the final solution of the human dilemma. It is all of God. He will establish it and nothing that man does, as man, contributes one thing to this. Not all of human wisdom, not all our vaunted knowledge, or our scientific discoveries will contribute one thing to the ultimate solution. According to the record of Scripture, all that man boasts in shall crumble into dust, and those things which can be shaken shall be shaken, and only "those which cannot be shaken shall remain," {Heb 12:27 KJV}. Those are the things of God. No flesh shall glory in his presence.

But that is not the whole idea. Do not stop there. If you do, you will be guilty of the extremism by which the devil keeps us off balance and eccentric in our thinking. God is working through these events of history, but he is working out his purposes on a basis totally different from the aims and goals of men. That is the helmet of salvation. Therefore, Christians are not to be taken in by the unreal and groundless expectations of the world, nor are they to withdraw from these and isolate themselves. Christians are to be involved in what is going on in the world for wholly different reasons than the worlding has:

Christians are to be involved in order to accomplish God's desire to confront men everywhere, at every level, in all enterprises of life, with the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ.

If we see that, it will save so much heartache, delusion, disappointment, and confusion as you read your daily newspaper. Nothing could be more important than this.

Why is it that thoughtful minds like H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw and others are simply staggered and bewildered by what they find in life? It is because they pinned their hopes on wholly unstable, unrealistic resources. As the Dean of Melbourne wrote concerning H. G. Wells:

He hailed science as a panacea for all ills and the goddess of knowledge and power. In a series of popular scientific romances he visualized the luminous *Shape of Things to Come*. In *The Food of the Gods* he

described a future of bigger and better men. He spoke of a planned world, of eugenics, of mechanized labor, of scientific diet and scientific education.

How much we still hear these phrases tossed about in our own day! But all of this fails. These thinkers built their grandiose dreams on a cloud, a cobweb, a shifting, shimmering illusion. And when the illusion changed shape, as all illusions eventually must, then their castles in the clouds came tumbling down. That has been the repeated pattern of history for twenty or more centuries -- men building upon shifting, ephemeral, temporary things, instead of on the unshakable things which always remain to which the Scriptures give testimony.

So the Christian has a helmet of salvation. He has a hope for the future. He has an understanding that God is working out his purposes and therefore he is not disturbed when human programs go wrong and everything fails -- when the New Deal, and the Fair Deal, and the Great Society, and all the other fancy names for human progress end up in the same old place -- time after time after time. The Christian has learned to expect wars and rumors of wars unto the very end. He expects false teachings and false philosophies and cults and heresies to abound. He is told all this will happen. It is part of the program, part of the total overall plan and purpose and moving of God in history. The Christian knows that wars are unavoidable, even though every effort should be made to avoid them, and that there is no contradiction in this. The Christian knows that war is madness, that nothing is really solved by war. But he knows also that we are living in a mad world, a world which is deluded by silken, subtle, satanic lies which are deliberately designed to end up in the mangling and mutilating of the bodies and souls of men.

Therefore, when he sees things happening as they are happening in Vietnam these days, he knows that it is unrealistic to expect to stop all this by passing certain legislation, or declaring certain principles, or sitting down to negotiate at a peace table. The world is in such a state and condition that the Christian knows that the innocent and the weak will suffer, and nothing much can be done about it at times. The blame lies squarely on the stubborn refusal of men everywhere to believe the true nature of the problem and the remedy that God's love has fully provided. The Christian knows that demonic forces can rise and possess the world from time to time, and will do so, and every human scheme to control these will ultimately fail.

What shall we do, then?

Shall we withdraw from life?

Shall we give ourselves to building our own little airtight capsule of life and look forward to retirement?

Shall we rise up and fight the United Nations or let the world go to hell? God forgive us, this too often has been the answer of Christians these days.

The helmet of hope not only tells us that these things are happening and will happen, but that a certain, sure salvation is coming, and that it is even now at work. This is what we need to know. Not merely that it will finally end right, but that the ending is being worked out now! History is not a meaningless jumble but a controlled pattern, and the Lord Jesus Christ is himself the one who is directing these events. He is the Lord of history. God is at work in the selfsame events that we look at with such horror and confusion.

We cannot identify ourselves with all the methods of the worldlings or even with all their aims, but we can identify ourselves with their persons. We do not need to join their causes, but we need to listen to them and to show ourselves concerned about them as people. We can be their friend without joining causes, and, if they balk at that, the choice is theirs and not ours. Jesus said, "The servant is not greater than his master. If they have received me they will receive you also, and if they hate me they will hate you," {cf, John 15:20}. We can expect both reactions as we try to involve ourselves in life around us, not in order to advance these hopeless causes, but rather to interest and concern ourselves with the people involved.

There are also many causes that the Christian *can* join. There are aims which he *can* wholeheartedly endorse. Christians are always to be humanitarian -- helping the weak, ministering to the sick, helping those who are old, and in prison, or burdened in any way. The Christian should always be ready to further good government, because government is of God. Even the worst of governments has, nevertheless, a basic

commitment and relationship to God. "The powers that be are ordained of God" {Rom 13:1b KJV}, the Scripture says. Therefore the Christian ought to be ready to alleviate social evil and to further understanding between countries if he can. Read the injunctions of Scripture. "Honor all men," {1 Pet 2:17}. "Do good to all," {cf, 1 Pet 3:11}. "Honor the king," {1 Pet 2:17}. "Obey your masters," {cf, Col 3:22}. "Provide things honest before all men," {Rom 12:17 KJV}. "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick," {cf, Matt 10:8, Luke 10:9}. These are practical exhortations.

Look at the life of the Lord Jesus himself.

Many are asking today, "Would Jesus have joined the Vietnam Day Committee if he had been here?" or "Where would he have been during the Berkeley riots?" The answer is perfectly predictable. He would not have joined any committee, just as he joined no social movement in his own day -- and there were plenty of them existing then -- but he would have been the friend to any who sincerely, even though mistakenly, were seeking to do good. He would have been the angry, vocal foe of any who were hypocritically using a cause to advance their own purposes, or to dirty and defile the minds and hearts of others. As he stood before Pilate, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world," {John 18:36 KJV}. That is, "I am no threat to you, Pilate. My kingdom is not of this world. I am not involved in any political maneuverings that you think might be a threat to your position." Nevertheless, he was known everywhere as the Friend of sinners.

All this is possible only if we put on, as a helmet, the hope of salvation. One of the great reasons the church is so confused in this day, and saying so little to the world of true significance, is because it has laid aside, by and large, the hope of the coming of the Lord. There are very few sermons preached on it, very little is said about it. There is no time given to a consideration of what it means, and why it is set forth so frequently, and so clearly, in the Scriptures. Great sections of the Scriptures that deal with this matter are simply ignored among Christians. As a result, our thinking is muddled and confused. The church does not know which side to take or where to stand. It has nothing to say, or, at best, it gives an uncertain sound which calls no one to battle and encourages no heart.

We are to remind ourselves frequently of the coming of the Lord.

How many times did he say, "Watch! Watch therefore. That you may be ready for that hour," {Matt 24:42, 25:13}. We must live daily in its hope and anticipation. The battle is not ours. This is not merely a private fight we are engaged in. We have been talking about this great struggle against the devil and his angels, against the principalities and powers, against the wiles of the devil, as though it were primarily a private fight. It does come down to that at last. It meets us right where we live -- in our homes, our offices, our relationship with our fellow human beings everywhere we turn -- but it is not only that, and it is always good to remember the fact. The battle is not ours, but the Lord's. We are individual units fighting in a great army. The ultimate cause is sure and the end is certain. We do not need to be troubled by all the things happening on the face of the earth, for our Conqueror has already won. Though we may be hard pressed in our immediate realm in this battle, the cause is never in doubt. The end is absolutely certain, the outcome is sure, the battle is the Lord's. It is not, finally, and ultimately, a struggle between us and the devil, but a struggle between Christ and Satan, and the outcome is completely sure!

Remember this!

When you pick up your newspapers and read frightening accounts of things which are happening, the destruction of moral principles which have supported and strengthened this nation for decades, remember that God has said that science will never succeed in working out human problems, and that statesmen will never succeed in producing the Great Society upon this earth. It is not wrong to try, but every Christian knows they will never succeed, that human knowledge will contribute nothing, absolutely nothing, to the glorious age which is to come at last upon the earth. But remember also that God is always at work in human life and in society. He is at work through his Body, to heal and to help, to love and to suffer, until that morning without clouds shall dawn, and the day break, and every shadow flee away.

Are you frightened by world prospects? Let me tell you this: It is going to get much worse! Jesus said men's hearts shall fail them for fear of looking after the things that are coming to pass on the face of the earth. If you

think it is hard to stand now, if these things throw you for a loss now, what will it be when the darkness increases, and the cause looks hopeless, and things get very much worse? That is the hour when we desperately must have the hope of salvation, the helmet to protect the mind.

The writer of Hebrews says, "We do not yet see all things in subjection to man, but we see Jesus!" {cf, Heb 2:8-9}. It is that which sustains the mind in all hours of pressure.

Here in this favored land of ours we have so much for which we can give thanks. God in grace has granted that we might be relatively free from so much that bothers and distresses others. But there are great areas of the world already where faith is not permitted to be expressed openly like this, where the darkness is far greater than here, where the forces of wrong seem to be striding in unopposed triumph through the land, and nothing seems to stand in their way. What do Christians do in those places? They have only one thing they can do -- they must put on the helmet of the hope of salvation. This will keep their thinking straight. It directs them in the causes to which they give themselves. It gives them advice and counsel as to where they should put their efforts and in what they should make investments of time and money and enterprise.

It can do the same for us. We need not succumb to the delusion of the world -- that redemption, salvation, and the working out of all human problems by the application of human intelligence is just beyond the horizon, in a little while now, if we can just get over into the new era, everything will be all right. How long has the world grasped at that futile dream? Read the ancient writings of the Greek philosophers and you will see they were saying the same things then. As far back as human history goes, men have ever been grasping after this illusive hope that something can be worked out here. But God has never said that. Consistently, throughout the Scriptures, he has said that man in his fallen condition is unable, absolutely and totally unable, to work out his problems. "When the strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are at peace," {cf, Luke 11:21}. There is no threat to his kingdom from within; there cannot be. We are shut up to the salvation of God. But in the strength of that hope we can keep our minds and our hearts calm and undisturbed in the day of battle, in the day of darkness.

Prayer

Father, thank you for this reassuring word. We know that things are not nearly as bad as they could be, or even perhaps as they shall be. But we thank you for the constant assurance you give to us that even when they get worse they are in your control, that nothing can come which you do not permit, nothing can happen which is not already anticipated and worked out, that the battle is the Lord's. Thank you for the certainty that we stand in the power of God and in the strength of his might, and that our hope is not in the flimsy constructions of men but in the eternal purposes of a living God. Thank you for this encouragement to our hearts today. In Christ's name, Amen.

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