The Book of Ephesians

Chapter 6:10-15

Ministry Reading

Opening Reading -- Ephesians 6:10-20

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Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 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, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.

The Armor in Its Right Context: A Heavenly Book

Before entering into the details of the armor, it is worth pausing to notice what book this passage is found in. Not Corinthians; not Timothy -- but Ephesians. This is the very epistle in which we have our place as accepted in Christ in the

heavenlies, Christ's place as our place, and our spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. That context is everything. The armor of God is given to people who already know their standing before God. In this warfare, therefore -- whether it be direct conflict with principalities and powers, or the ordinary circumstances of daily life -- there is never any need to raise a doubt about our acceptance with God and our place in Christ. That standing is settled. And it is precisely that settled standing which gives confidence in the midst of the battle.

High Places: A Puritan Mistranslation

When the King James Bible was produced, the translators rendered the word 'heavenlies' as 'high places.' The Puritans who produced that translation did not understand the doctrine of the heavenly position of the church, and so the phrase 'spiritual wickedness in high places' was read as a reference to earthly rulers and their governments. This gave the Puritans a justification for resistance to, and even deposition of, kings whom they judged to be governing contrary to God's word. The history of Scotland and England reflects the consequences of that interpretation.

But this is not a political passage. The verse itself refutes such a reading: our struggle is not against flesh and blood. As soon as one applies the passage to earthly rulers, one is in immediate contradiction with that plain statement. The true enemy is spiritual, not political. The heavenlies are not high places on earth.

Canaan: Present Warfare, Not Future Heaven

This portion of Ephesians answers to Canaan, just as chapters 1 through 5 answer to entering and dwelling in the land. The battles of Canaan are the battles in the heavenlies of Ephesians 6. The popular hymn about 'arriving on Canaan's happy shore' has long directed the thoughts of many toward heaven as the meaning of Canaan -- and that mistake raises an immediate problem: the battles of Joshua do

not describe heaven. Canaan is not the Christian's future rest; Canaan is the Christian's present warfare in his heavenly position. The battles with Amalek in the wilderness -- those belong to Hebrews and Peter, the wilderness epistles. The battles in Canaan belong here, to Ephesians.

The Christian is, in fact, in both spheres at the same time -- in the wilderness and in Canaan simultaneously. Israel could not be in both at once, and the sequential arrangement of their history (wilderness, then Canaan) has led some to reason that for the Christian too these must be sequential -- wilderness now, Canaan later, meaning heaven. But the Christian's experience does not follow that sequence. Just as Israel ate the old corn of the land while the manna ceased, yet we still eat of Christ as our wilderness bread while also feeding on Christ in resurrection and glory -- we do both at once. The Christian lives in both spheres.

Strong in the Lord: Joshua 1 Recalled

The exhortation 'be strong in the Lord' immediately recalls Joshua 1, where the repeated charge to Joshua was to be strong and courageous as he led Israel into the land. The power of the enemy was to be overcome; it was the will of Jehovah that Israel have the victory. And that required submission to His will and obedience to His directions. The principle ran consistently: when they obeyed, they had the victory. When they did not, they did not.

The great victory at Jericho was followed by defeat at Ai -- because of the hidden sin of Achan. And what is sobering is that it was not only Achan who suffered; others in Israel lost their lives because of his disobedience. What we do does not affect only ourselves or our own families. The consequences of failure run outward. So it is in the assembly of God. The power mentioned in verse 10 is connected, as we see in chapter 1:19, with the working of the might of God's strength that raised Christ from the dead. That resurrection power is what we are to depend upon.

All the Armor, Not Piecemeal

The tense in which we are told to put on the armor is significant. It is the same tense as 'put off the old man' and 'put on the new man' -- have done it, it is a completed action. The armor is not to be put on piecemeal, according to what we anticipate needing. The thought is not: I will pick up the shield when I see trouble coming, and the helmet when I think my mind is in danger. That would be to underestimate the enemy. The wiles of the devil are, by definition, not always visible in advance. God, who knows both the enemy's cunning and our own weakness far better than we do, has made provision for every situation. The answer is to have put on the whole suit -- not to select pieces as occasion seems to demand. Our defense lies in obedience.

Stand, Withstand, Stand

The passage has a threefold emphasis on standing: in verse 11, that you may be able to stand; in verse 13, having accomplished all to stand; and in verse 14, stand therefore. The goal of the armor is not victory in the sense of an aggressive advance, but a successful and maintained stand in the face of the enemy. Standing and withstanding are related but distinct. Standing speaks of the maintained position; withstanding carries a slightly more active note of resisting. But the overall picture is one of a people who hold their ground and never give it up.

Patterson makes the observation that in a moment of victory is precisely when we are most liable to suffer defeat -- if we relax the armor. The guard must never be let down. The moment of apparent triumph is the moment to stand all the more carefully. If we were conscious at all times of the heavenly position we have in Christ, and of Satan as a defeated foe, no doubt it would make a difference. Not that we go out in the strength of our own, but in the sense that our strength is in

Christ -- in the man of the glory who is there on our behalf.

Not Against Flesh and Blood

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. The enemies named in verse 12 are principalities, powers, the universal lords of this darkness, and spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. Daniel 10 gives a concrete glimpse of this reality: an angel sent to minister to Daniel was resisted by the prince of the kingdom of Persia for twenty-one days. There are spiritual struggles in an unseen world that have direct effects upon human beings in this world. Hebrews 1 shows the positive side: angels are ministering spirits sent out on behalf of the heirs of salvation. Zechariah 3 shows Satan standing at the right hand of Joshua the high priest to resist him. Job 1 shows God initiating a conversation with Satan about Job. These passages give real substance to the abstract language of Ephesians 6.

The universal lords of this darkness -- what darkness? The whole world lies in the wicked one (1 John 5:19). That is a post-cross declaration. It was not said in the Old Testament. The testing was not yet over, and man had not yet been finally pronounced lost. That verdict came at the end of the testing of the first man, set out doctrinally in Romans. Consequent upon the cross, God now commands all men everywhere to repent. The character of the world is declared, the prince of this world is named, and the saints of God are seated in the heavenlies in Christ -- and the enemy is opposed to that seating, as he was opposed to Israel taking their earthly inheritance.

The Girdle of Truth

In Scripture, the loins are a place of strength. To have the loins girt about with truth means more than merely knowing the truth. Knowing the truth and having one's loins girt about with the truth are not the same thing. The girdle of truth must characterize us as a source of strength -- it must be that upon which we

depend, the thing that holds everything else in place. The Lord Himself said in John 17, 'Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.' There is no truth outside of the word of God. The word of God is what gives us God's thoughts and sets everything in proper order. To have the loins girt with truth is to be dependent upon that word, not upon our own strength or reasoning.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Under the breastplate is the heart. The breastplate of righteousness guards the seat of the affections. The heart cannot be left unguarded -- cannot be allowed simply to follow whatever it feels at any given moment, or to be pulled this way and that by circumstances, impulse, or the suggestions of the enemy. The affections must be guided by righteousness. Without that breastplate, there is an opening for the devil's artifice: a fiery dart will find its way into the heart, and the affections will be misled.

David and Uriah stand as the most solemn example. David was at ease at a time when kings went out to battle. That moment of relaxed guard was the opening. The sin and its consequences were severe, and the chastening of God did not relax even after repentance came in. The Apostle Paul put it another way in Acts 24:16: 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.' That is the breastplate of righteousness in practical expression.

The Feet Shod with the Gospel of Peace

The feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace is not, in this context, primarily a reference to evangelization. The passage is about standing -- stand, withstand, stand. The feet need something to enable them to stand. Bare feet are in direct contact with the earth; there is no separation from the ground on which the person walks. The shoes provide that separation. And what the feet of the

Christian rest upon is the gospel of peace -- the settled knowledge that all is well between the soul and God.

What could give greater steadiness for this warfare than the knowledge and full enjoyment of one's place of acceptance in Christ before God? No question of one's standing before God needs to arise to weaken the stand. The soul is at peace with God, the conscience has no more accusation concerning sins, and this unshakable peace -- not made by us but made by God -- prepares the feet for the stand. From head to foot, God has made complete provision.

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Lord willing.