
The Book of Ephesians

Chapter 6:15-18

Ministry Reading

Opening Reading -- Ephesians 6:15-18

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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 Gospel of Peace: Standing, Not Evangelizing

The feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace has often been understood as a reference to bringing the gospel to others. But the context of this entire passage is the stand: stand therefore (verse 14), having accomplished all to stand (verse 13), stand (verse 11). The preparedness of the feet is in order to stand. We are the recipients of the gospel of peace -- the ones who have received it, and in receiving it have been brought into a state of peace with God. There is no question of personal disturbance in the soul regarding sins; peace of conscience before God has been established. And nothing weakens or hinders the stand more than an unsettled conscience. The gospel of peace, received and rested in, prepares the feet for this warfare.

Beautiful Feet: Separation and Holiness of Walk

Bare feet are in contact with the earth, without separation from whatever the ground may contain. Shod feet are separated. There is a hint in this of the principle of separation from evil -- a separation that belongs to a holy walk. Song of Solomon 7:1 expresses it beautifully:

Song of Solomon 7:1

How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter.

Darby renders it: 'How beautiful are thy footsteps in sandals.' The compliment is not merely on having attractive feet; it is on having feet with shoes -- separated from what would otherwise defile. The beauty of a Christian's life is found not in compatibility with the world, not in how much of the world can be incorporated while still bearing the Christian name, but in separation from evil unto the Lord. That is holiness of walk, and that is where beauty is found. The Apostle John said: 'I have no greater joy than that my children walk in truth.' Walking in truth brings peace and, with peace, joy.

The Character of the Gospel

The gospel is described in a number of ways in the New Testament, and each description brings out a different facet. The gospel of peace is one. The gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4) is another -- more exactly, the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ. The good news, in its fullest and most primary sense, is that Christ has been glorified. The glory of the Lord Jesus is the subject matter: that is the good news. He has been glorified at God's right hand. And for those who know that their sins were laid on Him -- since He is now glorified, those sins are gone. His glorification is the proof and seal of it. That is good news for the sinner, but the first and primary note of it is the glory of Christ Himself.

He is the Prince of Peace. His glorification demonstrates the acceptance of His sacrifice. Peace has been made -- not by us, but by God. The world speaks of men making their peace with God, as though the initiative were with man. But it is God who has made peace through the blood of His cross. Man is simply brought into the good of it. A conscience that rests on that is shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

The Shield of Faith

Above all, or in addition to all these things, the shield of faith. The tense is again the perfect: having taken it -- the shield is already in hand. Faith here is practical confidence in what God has said. It is resting in the word of God. And the shield quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Not some -- all. Every dart that the enemy sends is met by the shield of faith.

Moderation and the Fiery Darts

Doubts arise in Christian hearts. When they do, the shield of faith is not in its place. The shield quenches the dart; if the dart gets through, the shield was not there to meet it. This connects with what has been described in modern scholarship as the debate between 'minimalists' -- those who find little or nothing of historical value in Scripture -- and 'maximalists,' who believe every word. And between them, so-called moderates, who commend themselves as balanced and level-headed.

But moderation in divine things always has an element of unbelief in it. Francis Schaeffer observed in his 1984 book *The Great Evangelical Disaster* that when push came to shove, the moderates sided with the modernists. He had seen it in the history of Princeton Theological Seminary and its aftermath. This is not surprising. If one has ridden the fence long enough, when the fence shakes one falls toward whichever side has been receiving the greater portion of one's

weight. The moderate is a moderate because certain doubts have already crept in. He has allowed some of the fiery darts to pass. The shield of faith is not moderation; it is complete confidence in what God has said. This is not fanaticism -- God has never asked us to believe what is foolish or impossible. It is simply taking God at His word.

There is also a proper yieldedness that Scripture calls for -- but that has to do with our own matters before one another. It has nothing to do with yielding what God has said. To yield what God has said is unfaithfulness to God, and that is never what is meant by moderation or yieldedness in Scripture.

The First Fiery Dart: Genesis 3:1

The earliest fiery dart in Scripture is in Genesis 3:1:

Genesis 3:1

And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

The essence of that utterance was to raise a doubt in the woman's mind about what God had said -- to set the serpent up as the judge of God's own words rather than standing under them. And that is precisely the nature of every fiery dart since: something sets itself up not to be judged by God's word but to judge God's word from its own standing. The shield of faith is the answer: God is for me, His word stands, and I will not allow myself or anything else to sit in judgment upon it. The shield of faith is fundamentally akin to grace -- it is God for me. I cannot trust myself; God cannot trust me; but I can trust God.

Goliath's Shield: Each Must Hold His Own

Goliath had a man who went before him carrying his shield. When David slung the stone that struck Goliath in the forehead, that shield-bearer had no incentive

to cover Goliath rather than himself. The shield did not work. The shield of faith is like that: each one must hold it for his own self. Faith is a personal thing. One cannot ask another to hold one's shield against the fiery darts. And there is something about Goliath's arrangement that speaks of self-confidence -- the kind that does not carry its own shield, that trusts in its own strength and size. He needed no shield, he thought. And the stone went straight to his forehead.

The forehead speaks of the thoughts -- that which is visible, that which can be seen by others, the outward expression of the mind. Leprosy in the forehead was a defined category in the law. And 2 Corinthians 10:5 speaks of bringing every thought into the captivity of Christ. Goliath's forehead was the opening. For the believer, the mind unguarded by the helmet of salvation and the shield of faith is similarly exposed.

Five Smooth Stones and the Lord's Temptation

David took five smooth stones from the brook. The smoothness came from the running water -- and the Spirit of God is presented in Scripture as living, running water. The five stones have been taken as a picture of the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. When the Lord Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He quoted from one book only: Deuteronomy, the book of obedience, which presses obedience upon the children of Israel in every chapter. He used one stone, and it was enough. 'It is written' -- and that settled every temptation. He brought every thought of the enemy into the captivity of that word.

This brought down Goliath, and it will bring down every suggestion of the enemy. But David's victory was in two stages: he brought Goliath down with the stone, and then he ran upon him and took his own sword and severed his head. So the Lord defeated Satan in the temptation in the wilderness, and then at the cross, by death, He destroyed him that had the power of death. The first stage was the

defeat in the wilderness; the final blow was the cross.

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet protects the head, and so it speaks of the thoughts and the mind. To take the helmet of salvation is to be in the conscious, intelligent good of one's salvation. It is not merely to have been saved in the past as a historical fact, but to be in present, active consciousness of what salvation means and of one's standing before God. This corresponds to 2 Corinthians 10:5: 'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'

The Apostle Paul in Acts 26, in bonds before Agrippa and Festus, recounts the early moments of his salvation with evident warmth and freshness. And his first thought is for Agrippa: 'I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.' Here was a man in chains, separated from the work he loved -- yet wearing the helmet of salvation, so alive to his own blessing that he could think of the blessing of others. It is an arresting example of the helmet in use.

The Sword of the Spirit

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, is the only offensive piece of the armor. Everything else is defensive. And it is to be noted carefully how Hebrews 4:12 describes the sword: it is quick, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It is a sword that pierces and divides -- not a hacking instrument. The flesh tends to hack with the word of God. It is far easier to brandish a text and strike with it than to let it do its deep, dividing work in one's own soul and in the souls of others. But the proper work of the sword of the Spirit is the exposing of the thoughts and intents of the heart before God, so that they may be dealt with.

Right and Wrong Uses of the Word of God

In the Lord's temptation in the wilderness, both the Lord and Satan used the word of God -- the Lord to govern His conduct, Satan as a weapon. It is a sobering thing to observe. Even among the people of God, both sides on a question may be found using Scripture -- yet one of them is using it wrongly. And it is an awful thing to have been found using the word of God as a tool for hacking at a brother, driven by a motivation of harm.

A moral stream does not rise above its source. God knows the motivation, even when it is not apparent to those around us. If the motivation in taking up Scripture is to do damage -- to wound rather than to heal, to win an argument rather than to minister -- one wonders whether God gives any credit for having used Scripture at all. Satan received none. The words of a naval officer quoted by a brother once on this subject are apt: he gathered his captains on deck, and finding two of them quarreling fiercely with each other, pointed to the enemy fleet across the water and said, 'Gentlemen -- the enemy is over there.' The passage is not about flesh and blood. The armor and the sword are for the spiritual warfare in the heavenlies, not for use against our brethren.

Praying Always in the Spirit

The Spirit is mentioned twice in this section: the sword of the Spirit (verse 17), and praying in the Spirit (verse 18). These are not coincidental. Having been given the sword -- the word of God -- the use of it must be in dependence, in prayer. The sword is not to be taken up independently, apart from that dependence upon the Spirit of God who gave it. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit means the whole exercise of prayer -- not a particular form or intensity, but prayer in every season and of every kind, in the energy and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Praying in the Spirit does not mean praying in tongues. Paul himself asked the Corinthians, 'Do all speak with tongues?' -- and the answer was no. Since all are exhorted here to pray in the Spirit, and since all do not speak in tongues, the conclusion is simple. Praying in the Spirit is the prayer of a soul walking in dependence and communion, in the Spirit's leading -- offered in quiet confidence in God and in His word. That is what sustains and accompanies all of the armor.

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Lord willing.