

## **Protect Your Treasure with the Armour of God**

**July 2, 2017 - Andreas**

In 1969, a North Carolina rock hound named Robert Cutshaw was picking through the dirt when he found a sapphire that he described as “purdy and big”. So he took it home and hid it under his bed for eighteen years. If he had needed some quick cash, Mr. Cushaw told reporters, he would have sold it for \$500 or less.

Then one day in 1987 he was watching the news and heard a story about a guy in Arizona who bought a massive sapphire at a roadside rock shop. He paid \$10 for it; it turned out to be worth over a million dollars. When they showed the sapphire on the news, Mr. Cutshaw said, “I got a sapphire bigger than that right under my bed.”

So, he took his “purdy” rock to a gem cutter in Texas. After cutting and polishing it, the rock produced a 2111 carat sapphire. Some more cutting and polishing revealed a rare pattern in the rock that formed a Star of David in the main crystal.

Mr. Cutshaw’s sapphire turned out to be the largest and most valuable sapphire in existence and, in 1987, was valued at 2.75 million dollars. To borrow Scotia Bank’s slogan, Mr. Cutshaw was richer than he “thunk”.

If you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you too are richer than you think. No, it's not because of that sapphire sitting under your bed or because you have 2.75 million dollars in your bank account waiting to be spent, what makes you richer than you realize are the benefits that come from having God's Spirit in your life.

The Bible says, *What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love him – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.*

One of the things the Spirit reveals to us is the Father's love. When God's Spirit invades our lives, he assures us that we are loved without condition. He assures us that nothing we do can make God love us anymore; and nothing we do can make him love us any less. His love for you and me is unconditional.

The Spirit also assures us that we are loved without limit. The God of the universe spares no expense, not even his one and only Son, to secure your eternal wellbeing and mine. If you were the only person on the planet, God would still have sent his Son to die for you.

Imagine how we would live if we lived in this unconditional and limitless love every second of every day. We would live with courage, nothing would scare us. Because we are loved by the Father we don't need to fear death itself.

That brings us to the next benefit that the Spirit reveals to us. The Bible tells us that God's Spirit in our lives is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance in God's eternal kingdom. You and I have a future that's out of this world.

Imagine how we would live if we lived in the hope of that future every single second of every single day. We would live with confidence and without despair. We would invest everything we are and have in God's kingdom because we know that someday it will come back to us and pay eternal dividends.

That brings us to another benefit. Thanks to the Spirit in our lives, we have a place in the Creator's plan for all creation. We're not here just to hang out. We're not here just for a good time. We're here to do stuff that really matters. We're here to partner with the Creator as he redeems creation and brings it under his life-giving rule.

Again, imagine how we would live if we were mindful of that every second of every day. We would go about

our work, whether it's on the stage or behind the scenes, with a sense of purpose and direction. We would live without shame and regret.

The moment God's Spirit comes into our lives, we are infinitely richer than we realize. We have the resources to live with courage, with confidence and with purpose; but wherever there's treasure there's bound to be a thief.

In the case of Robert Cutshaw, the thief was simple ignorance. He didn't know what he had under his bed. Once it came to light, Mr. Cutshaw started storing his "purdy" rock in the vault of the local bank because all kinds of people suddenly became very interested in it.

If you've ever tried to live a victorious Christian life, you know that there are forces in the world around you and sometimes right inside of you that are bound and determined to steal your sense of the Father's love. They want to replace that sense with the sense of fear and anxiety.

Those forces also work hard to blur your vision of your future with Christ. They want to displace your sense of hope with a sense of despair. Those same forces are bound and determined to keep you from finding your place in God's plan. Their biggest fear is that you

start living a life of real purpose and that you actually make a real and positive difference in someone's life.

So, how do we overcome these forces? To find out let's read Ephesians 6:10-18.

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

*<sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and*

*requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

There's your answer for living a victorious Christian life. The first thing these verses tell us to do is to *be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*

Back in April, when we took a sneak preview of these verses, I told you how I used to be strong in my brothers and in their mighty power. When kids at school bullied me, I would glare at them and say, "I have six big brothers and, if you don't leave me alone, I'll get them to beat you up." I was being strong in my brothers and in their mighty power. It worked, until Franky Bergen called my bluff and started punching me. I closed my eyes and started swinging. When I opened my eyes he was on the ground with a bloody nose; and I was escorted to the principal's office.

When you and I are under spiritual attack, when fear floods our souls, when hopelessness takes over and when life seems meaningless, Ephesians 6:10 calls us not to grit our teeth and flex our muscles, but to **rest in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

By giving his life on the cross and by taking it back in resurrection, Jesus Christ disarmed every force that comes against us. By his supernatural power, death, disease and every other enemy we have are

powerless. Now, when we put our faith and trust in him, we become children of God, loved without condition; we become heirs of heaven; and we become partners with the Creator of the universe.

Whatever I'm feeling right now no longer needs to determine reality for me; from now on my reality can be determined by the victory that my Saviour and Lord won through his death and resurrection. I am a child of God. I have an eternal future. I have a place and a purpose.

It's a done deal; and nothing – *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation* – can undo the deal. Do you believe that? I hope you do.

The first thing we need to do, then, if we want to overcome the forces that are trying to defeat us, is be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power; and we do that by resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

There's more. Something else we need to do is **remember who the real enemy is**. After telling us to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, these verses go on to identify the enemy we're up against and the nature of battle we're fighting.

If you came up to me on a bad day and asked me, “Andreas, you look discouraged. What or who is bothering you?” my natural instinct, which is limited to the things I can see and sense, would be to point at the person who’s standing against me. “If that person just got out of the way,” I might say, “I’d be living the good life in Christ.”

If that person kept bothering me and I kept following my natural instinct, the next thing I would do is look for a way to get them out of the way. Based on what I can see and sense, my battle is with the person who’s bothering me; and victory means moving that person out of the way, whatever that looks like.

That’s what religious wars are all about. They are all about getting rid of the people who seem to be obstructing our devotion to God. We call them infidels; and we slay them in the name of the Lord. But Ephesians 6:11-12 pulls back the curtain, as it were, and reveals a much bigger picture than we can see with our naked eyes.

*Verse 11 says, Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. Verse 12 goes on, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*



These verses make it clear that the people who oppose us, the people we call infidels, the people we'd like to remove, are not the actual enemy. If anything they are marionette puppets on the end of strings controlled by the devil. Our real battle is with him.

Here in the West, most people no longer believe in this being we call the devil. For most people in our culture, the devil is nothing more than a symbol for pure evil; but the Bible makes it clear that the devil is real and active in our world.

If you want evidence of the devil, just look at the persistence of evil in our world. If evil were just a matter of human choice, wouldn't our race, or some small segment of it, outgrow evil eventually? Wouldn't there be some sinless human being out there? But something keeps sucking us back in and teaching us new and more depraved forms of evil.

Not only that, anyone who's dabbled in witchcraft, played with Ouija boards or cast out demons knows that the devil and his demons are real and active in our world.

Now, before we get carried away and start looking at everybody who opposes us as agents of the devil, we need to stop and realize something: You and I are not

immune to the devil's influence. In fact, at times, we may be the puppets at the end of his string.

"Hold it," you say, "that can't be. I'm a sanctified follower of Jesus. How can I be the devil's puppet?"

After Jesus told his disciples that he had to suffer and die, Peter pulled him aside and told him to stop talking like that. Do you remember what Jesus said to him? "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

The moment we start thinking and acting without reference to God, we become agents of the evil one. No, you don't have to be possessed by a demon. No, you don't have to be under the influence of the occult. You just have to look at life from a selfish or purely humanistic point of view.

So, one reason not to target the people who oppose us is because they are not the real enemy. They may be captives of the enemy, which should make us sad. They may even be agents of the enemy, which should make us angry, not at them, but at the enemy. The real enemy, folks, is the devil himself.

Another reason not to target the people who oppose us as we seek to follow Christ is because we may in fact be the ones on the wrong side of the battle, which

should make us humble and careful about how we approach people who stand against us.

Instead of telling us how to fight each other, these verses go on to tell us how to do battle with the real enemy. In our battle to live the Christian life, these verses tell us, we need to **rely on the armour of God**.

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,<sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

The imagery of these verses is obviously based on the armour of the Roman soldier. These verses mention six pieces of armour, plus one. The six pieces of armour are ...

- The belt of truth
- The breastplate of righteousness
- The shoes of readiness

- The shield of faith
- The helmet of salvation
- And the sword of the Spirit

These six pieces correspond to the armour of the Roman soldier; but there's no corresponding piece for the seventh thing mentioned, which is prayer. Roman soldiers had no means of wireless communication, like soldiers do today. By including prayer in the armour, without knowing it, Paul was actually anticipating the two-way radios and satellite phones that modern day soldiers use.

So, with the exception of prayer, the pieces of the armour mentioned here correspond to the armour of the Roman soldier. What about their order? Is it just random? Or is there a reason Paul presented the pieces of the armour in this order?

I believe there is. I believe the order of the armour in these verses corresponds to the strategy of the enemy. As we look at the different pieces of the armour and the steps in Satan's strategy to which they correspond, I invite you to be sensitive to your own vulnerability. Where is the enemy attacking you? Which piece of the armour do you especially need right now? We need all of them all the time; but at different times we need some more than others.

- The Belt of Truth ... Lies

The first piece of the armour is the belt of truth. This corresponds to the first step in Satan's strategy.

Let me ask: What is the first time the devil appears in the Bible? In Genesis 3, he appears as a serpent. What does the serpent do? He tricks our first parents into eating the forbidden fruit. How does he do it? He does it with a series of half-truths, otherwise known as lies.

The very first step in Satan's strategy is to feed us half-truths and lies. Next week we'll look at some of those lies. And we'll see that the first piece of protection we need against those lies is what? The belt of truth.

- The Breastplate of Righteousness ... Accusations

If the devil can't trick us into believing his lies, what does he do next? He accuses us of violating God's truth.

The most common name for the devil is Satan. "Satan" is the Hebrew word for accuse.

That's why Revelation 12:10 describes Satan as "the accuser of the brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night."

If you want to see Satan in action, read the opening chapter of the book of Job. There he appears before God to accuse Job of superficial devotion. “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan asks God, “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?” Satan then challenges God to remove the hedge; and God takes him up on it.

I don’t know if Satan is still allowed to appear before God to accuse God’s people; but if he is I know one thing for sure, he’s got a lot of dirt on me. In fact, he’s got enough dirt on me to fill me with enough guilt to last a lifetime and put me in hell for all eternity.

That’s why, if I’m going to rise above the guilt that comes from my failures and sin, I desperately need protection. I need the protection that comes from the breastplate of righteousness.

What is the breastplate of righteousness? Is it the good stuff I’ve done, my own religious acts and acts of righteousness? No! It’s the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which God transfers over to me when I seek his forgiveness in Jesus’ name. That’s what the breastplate of righteousness is. It’s the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to me and to you when we put our faith and trust in him. Have you got it? I hope so.

- The Shoes of Readiness ... Apathy

The truth that God transfers the righteousness of Jesus to us is one of the truths that sets the Christian Gospel apart from every other religion in the world. Instead of earning God's favour through our own righteous acts and religious deeds, God grants us his favour based on the righteous acts of Jesus Christ.

Not only is this a remarkable truth; it's a dangerous truth. Can you see why I call it a dangerous truth? It doesn't take a philosopher to see why it's dangerous. It's dangerous because it makes us relax.

"If nothing I do makes God love me any more and if nothing I do makes God love me any less, then I can just relax and do nothing. Better yet, I can do my own thing." That's the enemy's lullaby; and with it he has lulled more than a few Christians too sleep.

In fact, I'd say that's exactly what has happened to the Christian West. Here in the West, we have seriously overplayed the grace card. We've turned personal freedom into the highest good and made it an idol; and I believe we are in for some serious consequences.

To protect us from those consequences and from the spiritual apathy causes them, our feet need to be

fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. If we want to know and experience our place and purpose in God's plan, we need to be ready to live and act as his ambassadors in this world. That's why we're here.

- Shield of Faith ... Doubts

So what happens next? What does the devil do if he can't feed us lies, accuse us of sin or make us relax? Well, he attacks us with arrows of doubt.

More often than not, it's not inactive and isolated Christians that doubt God and his goodness. More often than not, it's Christians who are active in society. They set out with good intentions to live and act as God's ambassadors in the world; but then they face opposition; or things don't turn out the way they expected; or questions get raised about their beliefs. So, what do they do? They begin to doubt. When we live in a bubble, we don't doubt, but when we rub shoulders with people who think differently than us.

When we listen to our doubts and let them control us, they drive a wedge between us and God; but when we see the doubts coming and hold up the shield of faith, our doubts actually drive us to a deeper understanding and experience of God.



- Helmet of Salvation ... Distractions

If Satan can't defeat us with doubts, the next step in his strategy is distraction. Sometimes he tries to distract us with things that are obviously evil, like pornography and greed or whatever. More often he tries to distract us with things that are actually good.

The worst enemy of the great is not the bad, but the good. Working hard is good. But is it distracting you from God? The internet has much good on it. But is it taking your attention away from the people God has placed in your life, like your family and friends and fellow workers? Staying fit and active is good, but what about your soul?

Church history is littered with evidence of devout Christians who lost sight of the Gospel of salvation and became fixated on lesser themes. That's why the body of Christ is divided into more than 30,000 denominations. The worst enemy of the best is not the bad, but the good.

The helmet of salvation refers to the protection we experience – protection against the evil and the good things that distract us – when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. It has to do with the transforming of our minds and focus.

- The Sword of the Spirit & Prayer

The five pieces of armour that we've looked at so far have all been defensive. The belt of truth defends us against lies. The breastplate of righteousness defends us against accusations. The shoes of readiness defend us against apathy. The shield of faith defends us against doubt. And the helmet of salvation defends us against distraction.

If you've taken up these pieces of armour, you're a safe Christian; but you're not very dangerous. You're like a soldier who's found a foxhole and is hiding out inside. That's not how battles get won. Victories get won by people who go on the offensive; and in order to do that they need weapons. The last two pieces of the armour are our weapons: the sword of the Spirit and prayer.

The sword of the Spirit refers to the Word of God rightly used. I say rightly used because it is possible to use it wrongly and cause a lot of damage. When the Bible is rightly used, it sends the enemy running. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he was able to send Satan running. How did he do it? He did it by using Scripture. You can't live a victorious Christian life if you don't know what's in this book.

Prayer is direct communication with heaven. Through prayer we engage the forces of heaven in our battle against the forces of hell. My favourite analogy for prayer comes from the first Gulf War, which started on August 2, 1990.

During that war, American fighter pilots were able to drop their bombs with deadly accuracy. From thousands of feet in the air, they were able to pinpoint small buildings and blow them up. They could blow up an enemy hideout without damaging the school or the hospital right next door. They could send a missile through a smoke stack.

How did they do it? They did it with help from the ground. You see, long before the pilots left their airbase or their aircraft carrier, secret operatives – soldiers on the sly – snuck into the country, identified the enemy hideouts and planted themselves so they could see those hideouts.

Then, when the fighter planes were flying overhead, they would point a laser beam at the hideout and request an airplane high overhead to drop a laser guided missile. That invisible beam would then guide the bomb directly to the target and ... KABOOM!

That's a great analogy for prayer. You and I are the ground troops. Through prayer, we identify the enemy's stronghold and request help from on high.

With the sword of the Spirit and prayer, we are able to destroy the enemy's stronghold and bring God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.

## **CONCLUSION**

If God's Spirit lives in you, you have all the resources you need to live with courage instead of fear, with hope instead of despair and with purpose instead of regret.

Through his Spirit, God gives us riches money can't buy; but where there are riches there's a thief waiting and ready to rob us.

Being robbed is one of the worst feelings in the world. It happened to us just over a year ago when someone got into our garage and helped themselves to some of my tools. I felt sick to my stomach. I felt violated. I felt angry.

Satan is determined to rob us of the riches we have in Christ. He wants to rob us of the Father's love and replace it with fear. He wants to rob me of my hope

and replace it with despair. He wants to rob you of your purpose and replace it with regret.

Where are you most vulnerable right now? Are you in danger of believing lies? Then you need to be putting on the belt of truth. Are you being attacked by accusations and guilt? Then you need the breastplate of righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Are you being lulled to sleep by tunes of amazing grace? Then you need to put on the shoes of readiness to live out that amazing grace and share it with others. Are you being attacked by doubts? You need to lift up the shield of faith. Are you distracted? Then it's the helmet of salvation that you need.

Obviously there's a lot more to say about each piece of the armour and what it means to put them on. We'll be doing that over the next few weeks; but I challenge you to take some time not just to memorize these verses, but also ask the Spirit to teach you what each might mean and which you need the most right now in your own journey.