

August 1st 2010: New Series on The Armour of God: Eph 6:10-20

#1 "Made in Heaven" The Armour we are to wear is 'of God'...no human substitute will do.

Today we begin a new series and it's on THE ARMOUR OF GOD. Based on Ephesians 6:10-20, it's a subject that is familiar to many of us. I still recall those Sunday School lessons that began with a flannegraph picture of a Roman Soldier in his underware and to which was added each part of the armour, accompanied by the appropriate description.

Where I want to start however, is with the whole concept of The Armour of God as a unit.

After returning from holiday our sleeping habits were out of sync for at least a week. We dosed off as soon as we hit the pillow only to wake 30 mins later and be unable to sleep again for the next several hours. It was in one of those sleepless times that a thought about this armour sprung vividly into my head, with such intensity that I had to sit up straight away and write it down. And the thought? That it is the armour of GOD!!!!

Now I can sense some of you thinking, OK, but didn't you know that already Pastor ??? And my response is both yes and no. Of course I knew it was the armour of God, but what hit me was that it is the armour of God....It is God made, out of God material, especially for redeemed humans like you and me, for our protection and our progression in our ongoing battle against evil. I thought of the story of David fighting Goliath in the OT. How king Saul had pulled out his own armour for David to put on, but it just didn't fit. It was human made and not up to the job. And David didn't need it because he had something much better, tailor made by God for him. The armour God supplies.

While we were away we visited Venice, and I entered that city as a man on a mission. I wanted to buy a Venician Mask for my daughter in law who collects masks. Right away I saw that there were plenty to choose from. The street stalls were full of colourful masks, but as I looked at them and felt the plastic backing, I soon realized that their production owed a lot more to the Chinese than it did the Venetians. But when I went into the shops that filled the back streets I soon discovered masks made out of paper mache with the inscription on the back, made and painted by Italian Craftsmen in Venice. They were the real thing.

On the Armour of God there is written "Made in Heaven".

God has specifically prepared this armour for believers, so that we can live the life He has prepared for us to live and to do so despite all the attacks of the evil one and his forces. And the reason He does so is clear. There is no human substitute that will come close to doing the job. Do you think that being respectable and doing good will protect you? Wrong. Do you think going to church will protect you? Wrong. Do you think believing in God without committing your life to Him will protect you from the power of the evil one? Wrong again. There is no human armour that can stand against the wiles of evil....Against the principalities of darkness. Only the Armour designed and prepared for you in Heaven, will cause you to stand. And having done all, to still stand.

This becomes so evident when you consider this passage in the context of this letter to the Ephesian church.

Paul is writing from a prison cell in Rome to a group of believers who he knew pretty well. He had spent three years in Ephesus, preaching and teaching and pastoring amongst them. And he especially knew, that compared with the Jewish Christians, who had been brought up on a diet of the 10 commandments. Who came to the Christian Faith with an inbuilt sense of what was right in God's eyes and what was wrong. Compared to them these Gentile Christians were at a huge disadvantage because they were part of a society where good was called evil so often. And evil was called good. They had grown up in communities where drunkenness, immorality, homosexuality, bad language, gambling, cheating and so on were seen as no big thing...Not the best behavior maybe, but not necessarily that wrong.

R W Dale writing in 1901 in his Lectures on the Ephesians writes:-

When the new Faith had achieved its freedom from the control of the synagogue, and began to make its own way in the great heathen world, it was exposed to fresh perils. Many of its converts were men that had been corrupted by the gross licentiousness of heathen society, and they brought the vicious habits and the base ethical ideas of their former life into the church. Men who had acknowledged the authority of Christ, who had received Christian baptism, who sat at the Lord's supper, and who were rejoicing in the great hopes of the Christian life, had to be told that they

must not be guilty of lying, theft, drunkenness, and the grossest sensual sins. Christian truth was in danger as well as Christian morality.

So in his letter to them Paul begins by reminding them in the first two chapters of all that they have become and received in Christ. That as the chosen in Christ they have a life and an eternal heritage that cannot be equaled. There is no earthly existence outside of Christ, however attractive it may look on the outside, that can come close to the life that the believer has received as a gift of Grace from God through Jesus.

Then in chapter 3 he writes about how he has been appointed by God as their teacher, and how he yearns for them, and prays for them, and desires that they will respond to the Spirit's teaching through him, and become filled to the measure of all the fullness of God(3:19).

And only then, from chapter 4 onwards, does Paul start to lay down the responsibility that is theirs to live a life worthy of the calling they have received(4:2)

And it's when he comes to v17 of chapter 4 that he starts to get down to the real nitty gritty of his concerns:-

¹⁷So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

In other words Paul is saying, now you are Christians your lifestyle must express your Christian values. Whatever your neighbours think is ok for them to do, it's not OK for you any longer. You have become a child of God. A child of the light.

And Paul then mentions some specific behaviours to be avoided:-

V25....Lying

V26....anger

V28....stealing

V29...unwholesome talk...bad language...swearing...smutty talk

5:3.....sexual immorality or hint of sexual impurity....greed

5:4....obscenity, coarse joking

Whole heap more

5:18.....Do not get drunk on wine

And then he moves to the three areas of life that were under attack then and are still under attack today:-

5:22-33 Marriage. Society accepted then and just as much today a very low view of marriage.

6:1-4 Families. There was an evident breakdown in families then and it's happening today soon. So many problems with youth in our society, including psychological problems, can be traced back to poor parenting.

6:5-9 Employment. In Paul's day there were employers who felt ok about giving less than their best and Employers who readily took advantage of, and even abused their employees. It's probably happening more today than we realize. Christians in the workforce have a Christ given responsibility to be different.

Now this is indeed a whole heap of stuff to hang upon these Christians. It's a lot for us too, because the standard that is set is extremely high. And Paul has no intention of allowing them to think that they can make these changes in their own strength.

Because he knows that the real enemy is not society and how society acts. The real enemy is the powers of evil and of darkness.

6:12 *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.*

Peterson in the Message version sums up verses 10-12 in this way:-

And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.

While away we went one sunny Sunday afternoon to Camden Lock and the markets there.....A suburb that is towards the edge of central London. The place was crowded and as we walked down the main street we walked past shop after shop with open fronts that were mainly painted black, and from which some rather weird and horrible stuff was sold. Intermixed with them were many tattoo parlours and three times we were approached by this same man who had so many tattoos and rings attached that he looked like a walking curtain, who was offering us a chance to be tattoo-ed. I sensed a deep presence of evil in that place full of people, and yet they didn't seem to notice it.

Earlier that day we had been at a church service where the preacher had talked about the culture in which we live. The culture that is constantly in our faces. That pressurizes our children, our families, our marriages, our lives. And his comment was that more and more he is seeing so much of that culture as evil. As the blatant tool of the devil.

Paul would agree. That's why he tells us to put on the whole armour of God. We will not prevail if we trust human armour.....human schemes and programmes to protect us. We must start by understanding what this armour of God, made in heaven, is. And then we need to put energy and passion into putting it on. For it is a life and death matter.

In the tower of London they have a display of mannequins dressed in full suits of armour. As I looked at them I couldn't help but think of how hard it would be to put all that gear on, and how terrible it would be to put the lot on and then to have an urgent call of nature to attend to. It made me wonder why on earth they bothered with it. The answer of course is obvious. If they didn't wear the armour they would be destroyed on the field of battle.

As followers of Jesus we are against the devil's schemes. All of us, constantly. We are the foot soldiers he wants destroyed, corrupted, or made impotent. That's why we need to put on God's armour. This week let me challenge you to read through Ephesians; particularly the part about the armour, and to ascertain the importance you have given to putting it on. Then ask God to help you change that for the better over the next few weeks, for it is only with the whole armour of God on, that we will be able to stand against all the devious attacks of the evil one. And having done all, to stand.