

The Panoply of God Ephesians 6

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the necessity of the armor of God for Christians to effectively engage in spiritual warfare and maintain their relationship with God.

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that Christianity restores our relationship with God, allowing us to enter His presence through the sacrifice of Christ. He explains that the Christian life is characterized by daily communion with God, where even mundane tasks are elevated through service to Christ. Darby highlights the necessity of putting on the whole armor of God to stand against the wiles of the devil, emphasizing that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness. He encourages believers to remain dependent on God, using faith and prayer as vital tools in spiritual warfare. Ultimately, he reassures that through Christ's victory, we can resist evil and stand firm in our faith.

Transcript

One great thing in Christianity is, that it brings us back to God. Not only have we mercies from God, providential and the like, but we are brought to God. Towards the Jew God had a veil before His face, and He said, "I dwell in the thick darkness"; and once a year, on the day of atonement, the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat; but now once and for ever sin is put away by the sacrifice of Christ, and we are brought into the very presence of God. Good and evil being known, the question between good and evil had to be settled before God. The redemption of the cross brings us out of the evil - from the evil to Himself. God's Son suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God. The consequence of this is that the whole life of the Christian is to go on with God - every day becoming better acquainted with God - everything going on in the presence of God. All our ways are elevated by this. If only a servant, he serves not only his master but Christ; and therefore, if he has a froward master, he can serve him just the same, because it is Christ he serves. All the life of the Christian is perfect liberty, because he is in the presence of God; it is liberty from sin, from fear, from wrath. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord. The commonest things in life are raised in their character through service to Christ. The parent must not allow evil in the child, but train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and the master to the servant must forbear threatening. In virtue of our place before God, our liberty and happiness are as perfect and blessed now as they will be hereafter; only the body will be set right then.

Then, after speaking of the common details of life, the apostle rises up to speak of the proper position of the Christian as such - free in all things; but we are to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." He goes on to speak of the whole armour of God. We are supposed, though in conflict, to be in our proper position of blessing with God, standing in the power of redemption, not having to get there. The warfare is to stand when there. Satan's aim is to get us out of that place. There can be no conflict between us and God, but between us and the power of evil. There we fight as being God's army. We are naturally under Satan's power, but redemption brings us into God's army. This was the position of Israel when warring with Amalek: they were on God's side; and He said He would have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

333 Christ's conflict in Gethsemane was quite another thing. He was enduring, but He was accomplishing redemption too. We have it through Christ, and now have to stand. God can never use our flesh, but Satan always can; there is the difference. He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. The new nature Satan never can touch, but unjudged and undetected flesh he can, causing one to fall. The first and last thing and all through as a question of power is entire dependence. Satan will come in all manner of ways - worship, etc.; and, if the flesh is not judged, he will deceive us by it. The thing is, we want the evil of the flesh detected by the word of God and not by temptation. "The word of God is quick and powerful," etc. There is no good in the flesh. This, when I see how bad my flesh is, casts me only on God and makes me feel the need of dependence. With our Lord Jesus there was entire dependence, and this is the perfection of a man. With us how different it is! You know how many things you do of your own suggestion, not perhaps knowingly and willingly, but you are betrayed into it.

"To stand against the wiles of the devil" - that is the use of the armour of God.

Christ has overcome, and therefore we have only to resist the devil who will flee. If we resist him, he knows that he has met Christ who has all strength against him, for He has vanquished him. The devil can never touch Christ in you - only the flesh; so, if there is a fall, it is a proof you were walking in the flesh. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," etc. The contrast here is between the conflict with men that Joshua led the children of Israel against (flesh and blood as man, not sinful flesh, is meant here). Now we are not fighting with men, but we are Christians fighting with all these mighty beings, whose subtlety we are apt not to detect because they are so elevated - "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickednesses in the heavenlies."

Satan can easily overcome us with his wiles, if we are not found in the strength of Christ. I must have God's armour. Man's armour, intellect, or power is nothing in conflict with Satan. Satan used his wiles with Christ, but He answered him with the word of God, and there was no power against it. We must have the whole or complete armour. If I have a breastplate but no helmet for my head, I am assailable at this point. If it is only a matter of theory with me, I shall forget my helmet; but if I am in the place of dependence, I shall feel my need of it and take care to have it on. Independence makes us careless. If Satan can get a Christian to give an unchristian testimony to the world, he is satisfied. If he can dim the heavenly testimony for Christ here, his object is gained. Christ was God's testimony here. We ought to be so now; and what Satan is striving at now is to dim it. God would have us "able to withstand in the evil day," etc. All this time is an evil day. Though there is darkness in the world, we ought to be light in it. These are peculiar days of evil - heresy, infidelity, etc. So to an individual there are peculiar seasons of buffetings, tossings, exercises, evil days; but to stand is the great thing. We are sitting in unchangeable blessedness before God, but our position in this world is standing. So David sat before the Lord, yet he had to fight the battles of the Lord.

334 Our salvation is complete and perfect, for we are set down with Him who has by "one offering perfected for ever them who are sanctified"; but we are standing in conflict - just as the poor man out of whom Legion was cast was sent back to his house to tell them how great things the Lord had done for him. The world (Gadarenes) would not have him, and the world will not have us; but we are to be God's army in this world and a witness to them, though they will not have us. It is a question of struggling against Satan while having the flesh in us.

Therefore we need the "loins girt about with truth" - the affections girt up by the power of truth, and not to have all hanging loosely about. It is not merely having and knowing truth that will do. If the loins are girt about with truth, if the heavenly calling has power over you, you cannot follow the world; your affections will be in heaven, and Satan can have no power with you. The "loins" represent the inward bracing of the man's thoughts and feelings, and affections. All that is going on in the mind needs to be exercised in the truth so as to be girt with it. I can never use truth but in the presence of God, because truth is light, and light makes darkness manifest. Man on a sick bed will shew what is in his heart. There is sincerity there at last, when brought into the presence of God and abstracted from other things. There may have been much profession before, yet nothing but what is real stands before God.

335 All the perfection of divine life in man we get in Christ, and He is our example. In having on the armour of God we have on what Christ was and had (for example, the "breastplate of righteousness"). All these things which are ours in Christ should be applied to us. Take truth - Christ is the truth and the righteous One. He is my righteousness. But it is here used for conflict against Satan - not for God, but for practical power. I must have it before God first, or I shall not be able to contend with Satan. I am made righteous before God - this is a settled thing; and now I want all that Christ is and has been for my power against the enemy. If a man have a bad conscience, there can be no power against Satan. There must be the "armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." The loins must be girt with truth first, and then a man will walk as in the presence of God. There will be a savour of Christ's ways in his character. What a difference there is between a man walking before God, and one walking before men! What a trouble there is to keep things straight for a man walking before men! While one who is walking before God, though in the presence of men, can leave things quietly to God. The real difference between a mere professor of Christ and a Christian is just this.

"Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" means, not only having peace with God, but walking in the spirit of peace. There is sure to be peace in the spirit of a man who is girt about with truth, and walking in the power of divine righteousness. A man who has been walking with God many years will be more gentle with others than one who has just begun to know Him; he will neither crave things, nor be irritated at evil in another, for his own soul has tasted what the peace of God is, walking with God in the power of it. Even suppose a man has all this on, there is the need of dependence. Independence is sin, and there is need therefore of always being in conflict, and having the undeviating confidence that God is for me.

The thing wanted then is the "shield of faith." Satan comes and tempts me: Is God for you? How do you know? There are of course different kinds of temptation - not lusts, but questions whether God is for me, come what will. Then the shield of faith is needed. Christ was in an agony in the garden, but He could say, Abba Father, all things are possible to Thee. On the cross, when He said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" - "but thou art holy" - God has His place, come what will. We are not to be afraid with any amazement. If Satan succeeds in terrifying a man, he flies, and there is no armour for the back. Of Saul, David said, "the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away"(amongst the Philistines). "The shield of

faith" is that by which one is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. At Christ he threw a fiery dart when he said, "cast thyself down." Are you quite sure God is for you? Cast yourself down and try. No, says Christ; I know God is for me, I need not try. "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The dart is quenched by the word of God. If the dart of doubt or fear, etc., gets in, you have no power at all.

336 The moment the heart gets troubled, remember, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" If thoughts arise about yourself, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." God is for us through all, even chastening. If there is an Achan in the camp, God says, I will not go out with you: and they are beaten by a very little city. If God be for us, who against? The "shield of faith" is mentioned after the others, because there cannot be this lively faith (not the certainty of salvation is meant here but practical faith) if sin is allowed, and if the loins are not girt about with truth, etc. Recognising ourselves as a people connected with God, in respect to this power that is in Him, is just faith. Moses might have reckoned on God through all the murmurings of the people.

All this is defensive armour - "the helmet of salvation" also. There is not a single blow aimed by the Christian warrior yet. What is the helmet? God has saved me and will save me. "Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell," etc. It is a general, broad, full apprehension that all through God will be with me and for me; not only faith in the particular thing, and at the particular time, but as expressed in Romans 8. Nothing can separate from the love of God: therefore I may lift up my head with joy.

337 Now I can use the word of God offensively, as "the sword of the Spirit"; now I can fight. We ought to be able to confound every enemy, not with man's wisdom, intellect, and understanding, but in the power of the Spirit. Do others not believe in it? I am not going to give up the sword of the Spirit because you do not think it will cut. I know it will cut, and therefore use it. There is a power and authority felt by the person who uses it. There must be a sense of dependence for this; and therefore prayer, the sense of dependence expressed, is needed - "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Of one it was said that he laboured earnestly in prayer for the saints. This was because of the sense of the conflict from Satan going on with the saints; therefore labour needed watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. If other things come in, I have no power to turn every thing into prayer; therefore watching is needed. Give yourselves to prayer. You are in God's interests connected with all saints; therefore pray for all saints.

There is nowhere that conflict is so much felt as in prayer: that is where Satan desires to come in.

Verse 19. We should be bold for God in such a world as this. How far are you identified with Christ in the world? And are you careful to avoid everything that dishonours Christ? Whatever destroys Christ's character before men is really a fall, though it may not be positively gross sin.

It might seem strange at first sight that, in an epistle in which we get the greatest unfolding of the privileges we have as saints, at the same time, conflict is most brought out, where we have specially the relationship of Father and of the bride, there specially, in conflict, saints are called upon to take the whole armour of God, in order to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. It may seem strange at first sight here to talk of armour, but just where it is needed is such a place; and we never get into conflict till we realise privilege. Mark, it is not conflict of flesh and Spirit, but warfare in heavenly places against spiritual wickedness; not the same as in Galatians, the flesh lusting against the Spirit. Here we are in the new

creation, Christ having ascended on high as Head of it, having led captivity captive, and having taken us so thoroughly out of Satan's hands that He can make us vessels of His glory in this world; and that very thing brings us into conflict. If we have hold of this place, which is ours in Christ Jesus, we must reckon on having special conflict. We cannot cross the Jordan without finding the Canaanite and Perizzite in the land.

338 The wilderness on the other hand tests the heart, but it is not Canaan. There it is not wilderness exercises, it is wrestling against, not flesh and blood, but spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. The subject we had lately was our being dead with Christ and risen with Him, brought into the heavenlies in Him, a most valuable and precious truth to get hold of very distinctly. It is the place of every Christian, but not realised by many. To most one has to speak of the blood on the door-posts rather than of the Red Sea (that is, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ having entirely delivered them out of Egypt).

The whole question of sin was settled by the cross. As man was driven out of the first paradise because sin was completed, he is brought into the second because righteousness was completed, and the whole question of sin settled by Christ, now sitting at the right hand of God in glory. Not a thing between God and the saints as to sin, but we have them passing through exercises of heart, all in them tested and tried in the wilderness.

Then is the Jordan: passed through death and risen again, they get into the land of Canaan and eat the old corn. "Blessed with all spiritual blessings," etc. It is a place that is ours in spirit now and shall be realised hereafter. It is the character of the epistle all through true as to our tide. But first we find Canaanites in the land. We are sure of our place in Him, but His enemies are not yet all put under His feet; and the very fact of our being there in Him is to put us in conflict with these spiritual enemies. When people speak of Jordan as death and Canaan as heaven, they forget that fighting characterises Canaan. As soon as Joshua comes into the land, a man meets him as captain of Jehovah's host with a drawn sword. A redeemed people are Jehovah's host, and so completely Jehovah's servants, that He uses them to execute His judgments against His enemies. How could they fight Jehovah's battles with the flesh? If He uses a people, He must have them dead as to the flesh.

339 Paul does not simply reckon himself dead to sin, but when it was a question of service, it was always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, etc. He kept all that was of Paul completely down, so that to him to live was Christ, and nothing of Paul appeared. We are delivered to death, that the life, etc. What has a dead and risen man to do with the world?

As soon as Jordan is crossed (not only dead and risen, but circumcised, putting off the body of death mortifying the flesh), the old corn of the land is eaten, the reproach of Egypt being rolled away. We never get circumcision in the wilderness. What have we as dead and risen with Christ, to do with this world? True we have to run across the wilderness to glory; but as one with Christ in heaven, we are the witness and testimony of what a heavenly Christ is in the world that rejects Him. And in maintaining this place, will Satan (do you think) let you alone? Infidelity, superstition, and worldliness, these are things by which Satan is seeking to get souls into his power. His wiles are things that puzzle (the cities walled up) - great forms of piety, without the power, as seen in this day. Then we have these instructions for putting on the whole armour of God, in order to be able to fight against spiritual wickedness. We are not to get through in our own strength, and we have to find out what this armour is which we have to be clothed with.

The loins girt with truth is the first thing. Subjection to the word points out our soul's state, and therefore it comes first. There can be no divine activity till the loins are girt about - a common figure in eastern countries, where the long garments are girded up, not to impede. So we get the soul into order through the power of the truth applied, and everything - the thoughts, and intents, and purposes of the heart tested by it. The Lord said, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth," John 17. We have in the word all the thoughts of God, that can judge and bless man, and Christ is the centre of all. He was the light in the world. He brought out all the darkness in it, and applied the truth to it all. He brought out all that is divine and heavenly in a man, in contrast with all in men.

People think the world is a fine place; but Satan is the prince of it - they do not believe it; but he proved himself to be so, by bringing all against Christ up to the cross, and he will head up the world against God soon. Death had not been executed up to the cross. The truth, Christ Himself, came into the world, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. When the truth is effectually applied, we get the loins girded, the whole condition, as it were, tucked up and not trailing, ready for the activity of service. I have to meet Satan, and carry on the Lord's battles, in conflict against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places; my heart is first to be tested, and to be brought into a heavenly world. Christ brought it there, and He says, Is heaven in your heart? I get the revelation of all in me that is against Christ, and all that is heavenly in Christ; my condition is the effect of truth. He was it, I get it from Him. I do not want armour in walking with God - I want arming against Satan.

340 Next, the breast-plate of righteousness, not righteousness with God, but taking up armour against Satan, my condition of soul and heart being right. My feet walk through the world, shod with the preparation, etc. It is the practical effect of the condition of my heart, and what a blessed condition! It is not selfishness, saying, "I must maintain my rights." But when a soul is at peace with God, he will be meek and lowly, like Christ; he goes out then in the spirit of peace, and carries through the world the character and spirit of Christ. "Peace that passeth all understanding" keeps his heart and mind. How a man full of peace subdues all around him! Christ practically had perfect restful peace; He carried it with Him in all He passed through; in Him we have the fruits of righteousness sown in peace.

First, then we have the loins girt - the truth of God applied - to bring the soul into a right condition; secondly, practical righteousness (breastplate); thirdly, the feet shod with the gospel of peace. Now, we have to take up the shield of faith. I need not be thinking of self, though it is quite right to judge myself. I am to have practical faith in God. We are not called upon to confess sin but sins, although confessing the sinfulness of my nature, but it is never to be made an excuse for sinning. If I sin, I have failed in keeping my eye on God, and so have failed in keeping sins down, and in keeping the enemy closely shut up. The shield of faith is to have the eye on God, with perfect confidence that He can keep us walking in the light, as He is in it. Satan may do what he pleases, shoot his arrows from his lurking-place; but they cannot break through the shield of faith. The victory has been attained over him by Christ as man. He not only put away sin, but through death destroyed him who has the power of death. We are exhorted to "resist the devil," etc. Flesh does not resist him, and if he is resisted, he knows he has met Christ in us and runs away. It is not a question of the power of Satan, but of faith, of looking to Christ. The fiery darts of Satan never get through the shield of confidence in God; my weakness is just what His strength is made perfect in. What so weak as death? Christ crucified through weakness. What so contemptible to man as the cross? But it is the wisdom and the power of God. When we own ourselves weak, then we have power from God to overcome Satan. He is a most subtle enemy, he knows how to deal with man, and is much cleverer than the wisest of men. Therefore when you see learned and clever men give way to folly, you

must remember that Satan is behind it all; they are using his strength, and he is laughing at them. If the shield of faith is down, the fiery darts will get in.

341 How blessed to know we have Christ to go through everything with, and, having him, all the evil in the world cannot overcome us. It is not "Because I go to the Father, you shall overcome the world"; but "I have overcome it." Still we have to be overcomers in a world where Satan, as the power of evil, was never more actively employed than at present. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Having full confidence in God, we can hold up the head, because we have for an helmet salvation. First, godliness of walk; second, peace of mind; third, confidence in God and salvation covering him. The believer can now be active. He takes the sword of the Spirit, and fights, shielded from all the attacks of Satan. Now, there can be activity in using the sword of the word.

But we do not always judge ourselves; we do not always look to see whether we are walking in a practical sense of being all for God, so that God can be all for us when in conflict. The first great thing, if we are to be active for the Lord, is being right with the Lord. Look at Paul, always self-judging, keeping under his body; always completely for the Lord, and the Lord completely for him. Ever in the secret of the Lord's presence, he got the power of God for service - the strength of God made perfect in his weakness. He was not hindered, or distracted by circumstances, whatever came; he never drew back; he had the secret of the Lord, and could go out in service, according to what His presence and glory required. Herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void, etc.

342 "Praying always," etc. We now get the word of God and prayer. Mary sat at the feet of the Lord, and heard His word. Then, in Luke, the disciples say to Him, "Lord, teach us how to pray"; again, "Men ought to pray always and not to faint." The apostles appointed deacons to serve tables, that they might give themselves continually to prayer, etc. When the Lord was in an agony of prayer, Peter was sleeping instead of watching, and so went out and denied his Lord, whilst the Lord witnessed a good confession; and when the soldiers came to take Him, He had calm power. If you want to know what prayer is, see the Lord agonising in prayer in Gethsemane: that is prayer - no hurry or bustle, but the soul perfectly calm with God.

Has God given us to be associated with His own interests? Do I not yearn for the conversion of sinners? Do I not yearn to see a saint representing Christ more perfectly? I must go to God about it in earnest prayer and supplication, watching with all perseverance for the answer. The same word that is used for the praying of the Lord in Gethsemane is used by Paul here - agonising in prayer for saints. We get this earnestness in supplication from being in the interests of God, and knowing that His interests have to be carried on in earnest supplication and prayer, watching thereunto. I have to get with God in prayer, if preaching the gospel. Prayer is the expression of entire dependence on His power; not simply asking God about things, but agonising for the answer. People think that the apostle Paul is beyond, sailing over the heads of all others; but what is his language? "I was with you in weakness and many tears."

Faith goes with God's affairs to God, so interested with Him about them, that we make them our own. God takes the people delivered by His Son out of the hands of Satan for His own servants, saying, I want Christ to be glorified on the earth, and you are to do it. We may be poor feeble things, but we have the same interests as Christ, and His strength is made perfect in our utter weakness. What a blessed place to be in! Being made Jehovah's host, to battle against His enemies and Satan. Those in the forefront of the battle need more the whole armour, because more exposed to the fiery darts, and more in the way of the enemy's snares and dangers; those who lag behind are not in the same danger. But more strength will be

given to meet and overcome everything, if there is perfect dependence on and faith in God, as in John, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith," 1 John 5:2. But in no place need one be more unceasing in prayer and watchfulness than in the forefront of the battle.

343 In bearing witness for Christ, we first have the helmet of salvation from Christ. How little we know how to watch unto prayer! Is all that you and I pass through in the day turned into prayer, and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto for all saints? Do you find you are continuous in prayer? Do you find your heart going up in earnest agonising supplications for the saints? Nothing I find so difficult, and nothing so tests my heart, as to the right way to think of others, as asking, Is my soul so interested in others that I can have continuous and earnest supplication going up for them? To do so, the soul must be right with God. I must think of myself else, and that stops intercession for others.

It is an amazing thing to walk with God in the light, so as to be able to take up His interests; provided with this armour, which we have to keep on, to stand against Satan. Satan has no strength against those who are faithful to Christ. It is not leaning on human wisdom. Satan is much cleverer than all the learned men down here. You will always find it is where redemption is not fully rested in that Satan plays all his tricks. If the finished work of Christ were really known, and full and complete redemption rested in, superstition and ritualism would have no ground to stand on; the foundation of it all is, that something has to be done by man to make the soul right with God. If Christ has settled the whole question for me, I do not want any of their means to settle it. The Puseyites can speak beautifully of the incarnation; but they cannot bear to hear of the finished work, or of your place with God being once and for ever settled by redemption. The sophistries of rationalism and infidelity cannot tell on a soul that knows Christ, and has Him dwelling in the heart.

Oh! beloved friends, may the Lord keep us in more entire dependence and unbroken communion with God, ever walking in the presence of God, in the light, till that blessed day, so soon coming, when Christ will rise up and take us to Himself!

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