



*"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the*

*shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:14-18).*

## **The Spiritual Warfare**

St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, speaks about the armor of God. Armor means weapons or the clothes that a soldier wears during war. When St. Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he had in his mind, for an analogy to spiritual weapons, the Roman armory; and the armored Roman soldier was the model he took. The rise and flourish of the Roman Empire was attributed to the well equipped Roman soldier finely trained in war strategies, weaponry, offense and defense tactics and the understanding of the enemy's mind. St. Paul applied the Roman soldier model to spirituality using it as a visual example for both offensive and defensive spiritual weapons.

When Satan tempts us causing us to fall in sin of any sort, usually the outcome is depression, unhappiness and depletion. Restoration of peace and happiness comes only with victory. The armor of God in Ephesians 6:14-18 is a wonderful weaponry leading to victory with which there will be no room for defeat or emptiness.

The armor of God is both defensive when others attack and offensive ready to launch an attack on Satan and army. Doubtful thoughts of many kinds can occupy the mind. For example:

- Does God really exist?
- Does God really forgive and forget?
- Why should I pray if God sees and knows everything before hand?
- Why should I read the Holy Bible if it is full of errors?
- How can we be so sure that Jesus was not just a man?
- Who can prove the authenticity of the Holy Bible?
- Why is God not taking care of me in times of trouble?

If you feel guilty about a certain sin and you are doubtful and fearful; it could be because you are not wearing the protective armor of God that he has

provided for you in order to achieve victory and happiness. In order to be able to defeat and overcome such satanic thoughts, we need to put on the armor of God.

## **The Spiritual Armor of God**

How does the armor of God look like and of how many pieces is it made up?

The armor of God is of course spiritual weaponry composed of spiritual components. The imagery is just for the sake of clarifying things and bringing them home to our human limited thinking. It is made up of six pieces covering virtually all the most important body parts leaving enough room for offensive weaponry.

An advice: when you put on the armor of God remember never to put it off because once you take them off you will be exposed to the attacks of the enemy.

Before introducing the whole array of armory that St. Paul wants the believer to put on, he registers the expected outcome, victory and strength; *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" which is only achievable through putting on "the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but*

*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:10-13).*

Thus defining the battlefield, the type of enemy we are facing and the sort of weapon we need to put on, we are set to win such a battle. Putting on the whole armor of God entails putting on the whole set of armor without leaving out a single piece.

Why do we need to put on the armor of God? We need to do so because we do not fight nor wrestle against a human being (flesh and blood); but against principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places. You should understand your enemy first before you put on the armor of God.

*"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood..."* (Ephesians 6:12). This verse tells us at least three things about our enemy:

- a. He is not a human being, but Satan and all his army.
- b. Satan and his army have a very organized hierarchy.

- c. Our enemy is spiritual and therefore, he needs spiritual weaponry in order to fight him. "*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds*" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

In reality it is not the people around us that we have to fight with; but Satan and his army moving in this world instigating evil; causing all kinds of strife, fight and animosity. Although Satan has already been defeated by Christ on the cross, yet he does not want to accept nor admit his defeat.

## **The Protective Garment**

When introducing the armor of God, St. Paul was very careful to introduce the whole picture in the order the weaponry is put on without missing out on any single detail starting from the inner to the outer parts because the inner gives support to the outer.

### **1. *The Belt of Truth***

A belt is a girdle. The function of a girdle or belt is to keep things or parts fastened in place.

Without a belt such things remain loose, liable to fall apart. A Christian should put on the Belt of Truth because without the Truth, nothing else will make sense nor remain connected. Who is the Truth? The Truth is defined clearly in the Holy Bible as our Lord Jesus Christ, "*I am the*

*Way, the Truth and the Life"* (John 14:6) "*you shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free*" (John 8:32). Therefore to girdle our waist with the Truth simply means discipleship to our Lord Jesus Christ. Once we come to know and define ourselves as Disciples of Christ, we can then boldly profess "*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever*" (Psalm 125:1). Just as a belt is associated with safety and keeping things firm in place, so will discipleship to Christ keep us steadfast, unshaken by doubts. Being sure I am following the Truth, I will not be shaken in my beliefs; nor will doubts find a place in my heart. St. Peter proclaimed his discipleship to Christ firmly and unshakably saying, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (John 6:68,69). Knowledge without obedience to the truth by itself is not enough and will not make you steadfast; it is obedience to the truth that will make you so.

The girdle protects the mid lower abdominal area i.e. the loins. Behind the belt is the kidney. The kidney, in a spiritual sense, represents filtration or purification. David asks God to

purify his kidneys, "*Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart*" (Psalm 26:2). Also, "*my reins also instruct me in the night seasons*" (Psalm 16:7) showing how his kidneys (representing the inner man) are warning him to repent and purify himself. So, here comes the role of the truth in that it is in the light of and based on the Truth that your heart rebukes you against the measuring stick of the Truth. When you follow the Lord Jesus Christ, he will always lead, guide and enlighten your mind in the decisions that you make and assist you to lead a pure life. One of the monastic rites is the wearing of a belt indicating purity; affirming and reminding of the vow of celibacy.

Just as light expels darkness in the natural physical realm; so does Truth set us free, in the spiritual realm. Before getting to know the Truth, St. Moses was a violent man, a murderer, a gang leader, a thief, a terrorist. But after getting to know the Truth, his life had changed completely; because the Truth had set him free. St. Paul acknowledged that before encountering Christ, he was a persecutor of the church, of God and a blasphemer (1 Timothy 1:13). After coming to know the Truth, he was set free. The Truth of the Holy Bible sets many free and will do so to

you if you accept it, bearing in mind that the Truth is not just a set of ideas, facts, premises or beliefs; but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The girdle around the waist speaks of the person in his innermost being, indicating the need for becoming cleansed from within before proceeding to without. "*First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also*" (Matthew 23:26); was our Lord's command to his disciples.

## **2. *The Breastplate of Righteousness***

The breastplate protects the heart. The heart nourishes the body by pumping blood through the circulatory system; thus keeping the body with all its organs alive and functional. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, righteousness flows through our thoughts to righteously feed our emotions, intentions, words and thus actions; keeping us spiritually right with God. "*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God*" (1 John 3:21). The Breastplate of Righteousness will guard our hearts against drifting away from God. A heart filled with the Holy Spirit will bear the Fruit of the Spirit demonstrated in the good deeds we perform. Our heart will condemn us if we miss the opportunity of expressing love and kindness,



patience, self control, meekness. It is Satan's greatest desire to condemn us and make us feel guilty and miserable. He pulls our legs to sin; then he holds us accountable and falling short in many areas. Not so with someone living a life of commitment to the Holy Spirit. Righteous acts will enhance our relationship with God.

According to St. Paul "*we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). We come to the understanding that God has prepared a plan for us. If we fail to carry out and walk in His plan, we will damage our relationship with Him.

However, the good works cannot be accomplished without God's help. "*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6). The Holy Spirit is willing to assist as long as we are in good terms with Him, not quenching, grieving, or stopping His work in us.

### ***3. The Helmet of Salvation***

As a common well known armor, the helmet is not restricted to Roman soldiers. The position of the helmet is on the head for the purpose of protecting the skull from fractures and the brain

from damage. Likewise, spiritually, our helmet of salvation resides in the continuous repentance over our sinful thoughts, and the constant renewal of our mind, "*do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2). All the great saints who had led a sinful life prior to repentance, were transformed through repentance and mind renewal; putting their minds on things above (Colossians 3:2) mainly their salvation, and what Christ has done for us. The greatest battlefield is the mind. Any sin starts with a thought, which if not curbed from the start, can develop into an uncontrollable sin. Satan is always after our thoughts; because strategically that is where he can ruin our salvation. St. Paul entreats us to "*bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:5) because he is the cause and reason of our Salvation.

#### **4. *Sandals of the Gospel of Peace***

The foot is that mobile part of the body that moves us around. Walking barefoot is painful and damaging to the feet. Similarly walking in the lack of heavenly Prudence and Wisdom will lead us to destruction. "*He sins who hastens with his feet; he who takes quick moves without*

*enough thinking will commit sins"* (Proverbs 19:2). A good pair of Sandals gives a good protection to the foot. Some historians recorded footwear as one of the greatest reasons the Roman army was so victorious over their enemies. A Roman soldier was equipped with spiked footwear that provided them with a strong, balanced stance and a superior posture especially when fighting on hills and uneven plains. In military arts, the stance is the most important tactic a soldier learns; and is practiced first and foremost. Hence all the manners of kicks and punches are launched. Spiritually applied, good sandals indicate a good walk with God in peace and reconciliation with Him and others. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"* (Matthew 5:9). A correct stance with God will ensure the peace of God, a sensitivity for His heavenly wisdom which is *"pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy"* (James 3:17). Gradually such a person will be blessed and become heavenly qualified to proclaim the Gospel of Good News to those around him, making peace with the far and near. *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace,*

*who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"* (Isaiah 52:7). Our good sandals are our reconciliation and love towards others. During the Divine Liturgy, before Holy Communion, the deacon instructs us to greet one another and be genuinely reconciled with one another. This cannot be done without an effort; and we have to "walk" to it following the example of God Himself who in His limitless, unconditional, and sacrificial love "walked" down to us from heaven and died on the cross in order to reconcile us to Himself, establishing peace on earth (Ephesians 2:15); liberating man from the bondage of hatred and strife and granting us the title of being "*Servants of Reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:18), and our gospel "*the Gospel of Peace*" (Ephesians 6:15).

### **5. *The Shield of Faith***

In the past, soldiers used to fight with arrows. Hence, the need to deflect the arrows arose bringing the shield into existence. The Roman soldier's shield was full length armor, either rectangular or circular in shape, designed to protect the whole body and which a soldier carried in his left hand. Symbolically, St. Paul uses this piece of weaponry to register the need

to be shielded in faith in order to deflect Satan's fiery darts of temptation (of all kinds) and doubts. "*You, o Lord are a shield for me*" (Psalm 3:3). "*And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith*" (1 John 5:4). By definition faith is "*the evidence of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1). The common saying: "seeing is believing" does not conform with God's reality of "believing is seeing". Our Lord first demanded faith from people before performing miracles among them "do you believe?" We need to speak what is to come; not what already exists. "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29) and those who believe, will certainly "*see the glory of God*" (John 11:40). We do not have to experience things with our natural eye in order to believe. Our vision comes from our faith in God which will enlighten and enable us to see the invisible.

## **6. *The Sword***

The sword, held by the Roman soldier in the right hand, is the sharpest weapon in the whole armory. A sword made of pure steel is stronger and more effective than one made from any alloy; though the latter might look more attractive and radiant. St. Paul uses this weapon to symbolically represent the Word of God which

he describes as "*sharper than two wedged swords*" (Hebrews 4:12); presented to us in its purest form undefiled or marred by wrong teachings, interpretations, or personal interests. On the Mount of Temptation, both our Lord Jesus Christ and Satan used the Word of God as a weapon. The former used it in its purest, untwisted form of "*it is written*" (Matthew 4:4) and "*again it is written*" (Matthew 4:7); thus gaining victory; while the latter twisted it to suit his own purpose; ending up in defeat and regression. With His victory our Lord Jesus Christ has set for us an unprecedented victory to pursue and accrue; and an example to follow and pass on to others.

### **Connection with the Great "I Am"**

Having all the armor on, but losing connection with the Commander in Chief avails nothing; and the fight is a lost one. Our Commander in Chief is God, the great "I Am" and the intercessory blood of Jesus Christ. St. Paul concludes the description of the required armor of God by stating the need for connection with God; "*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*" (Ephesians 6:18). Without prayers efforts dissipate, power weakens,

might disappears and wealth depletes. Staying connected to God, on the other hand, tunes us in to His instructions making us sensitive to hearing His word and following His plan for our lives.

In the Old Testament, at war times, all the armory that God had demanded from people were prayers, songs and praises (in the case of Moses holding his hands up) (Exodus 17:11) and praise (in the case of Joshua and the walls of Jericho)(Joshua 6:20) and also with Gideon, God the Almighty asked the soldiers to blow their horn and just praise (Judges 7:20). Even in the New Testament, when Christ was about to send his disciples, He commanded that they carry nothing with them; "*when I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?...Nothing*" (Luke 22:35) confirmed the apostles. When Peter raised his sword in the face of the soldier, the Lord commanded him to put it back in its place because "*for all who take the sword will perish by the sword*" (Matthew 26:52). From this we conclude God is not in need of man-made weaponry. It is only for the sake of imagery and analogy that St. Paul appeals to the Roman armory to bring spiritual matters close to understanding. His were always spiritual weapons especially when facing spiritual enemies; "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,*

*against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).*

## **Conclusion**

St. Paul who recommended putting on the armory discussed in Ephesians 6 is the same St. Paul who recommended putting on Christ; *"put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Romans 13:14), for in Christ *"we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28). Christ is our one-piece armor which embraces all the other pieces. Once put on, He will protect every part in us starting from within and proceeding to without; making us *"fruitful in every good work"* (Colossians 1:10) *"some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty"* (Matthew 13:8), light to the world, salt to the earth, and an example to be followed, *"that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

In a one-piece overall garment Christ is at once,

- a. The Belt of Truth: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6).
- b. The Breastplate of Righteousness: *"being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"* (Philippians 1:11).



- c. The Helmet of Salvation: *"but we have the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- d. Sandals of the Gospel of Peace: *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you"* (John 14:27). *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15).
- e. The Shield of Faith: *"He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"* (John 11:25).
- f. The Sword: *"the words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63).

May we all remember St. Paul's command to

*"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:14-18).

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern US