Food For Thought: It’s a Battleground Out There

“...Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.. “
~Proverbs 12:26 NIV

I’m sure you’ve been there – had one of those weeks where everything seemed to go from bad to worse as the week wore on. You did the wrong things, said the wrong things, and your thoughts, well, we won’t tell you what you were thinking. Mine started with a car dealership that painted the trunk lid of my prized possession the wrong color. Then the bills seemed to be coming due too fast, and to top it all off, I started getting sick. Somewhere in the midst of all this, God started tugging on my sleeve trying to tell me something. I didn’t know what to do, what to say, or where to turn. Usually when I find myself in situations where things don’t seem to be going well in my life outwardly, my inward spiritual life isn’t in order either. So that’s the first place that I start looking.

I ran down my checklist and did an internal inventory to see where the problem was: am I doing the right things, check; reading my Bible every day, ah, er, when I can; praying regularly, check; immersed into church activities, check; witnessing, er, um, kind of, check; living a moral lifestyle, check; attending church services, check, but sometimes I miss. Humm, not too bad - just that one rough spot. I know that I haven’t been taking much time to read the Word lately, but I can explain. It can’t be that...That can be the cause of all this strife, can it? God understands, right? No, I don’t think that God does understand. He knows that I haven’t been reading the Bible lately for all the wrong reasons, and now, I know He knows. Time to make amends.

When I opened my Bible this morning, I found this interesting verse in Galatians that seems to bring all of this into perspective. – I think that was God’s plan all along and He lead me right to it (funny how that works). Paul spoke in this chapter about we who follow Christ occasionally let outsiders, and the worldly events influence us. He said that, “A little yeast works through the entire batch of dough” (Galatians 5:9).

And that got me thinking: Bad attributes, bad habits, and the tug to pull away from Christianity, can begin with just a little bit of room. And like yeast, that little bit of room can spread through our entire being if we let it.

Every day we Christians put on God’s armor to do life’s battle. Leaving off just one piece can leave us vulnerable. A few days ago I was watching the Little League World Series on television. Things have really changed since I played in Little League, but one thing I noticed that hasn’t changed much is the equipment the players use. The bats, balls, gloves, and shoes still look pretty much the same.

There is one player on the team that has some very special equipment. That’s the catcher. The catcher is in a very dangerous spot right behind the batter and needs special equipment for protection. The catcher always wears a mask. The mask protects the catcher’s face from foul tips or pitches that might get past the glove. The catcher wears a chest protector to protect the middle part of the body. Finally, the catcher wears shin guards to protect the knees and legs. No catcher would ever think of going into the game without all of his protective equipment.
The Bible teaches us that you and I need that same kind of protection in the game of life. Just as Roman soldiers required physical armor to fight their wars, we Christians require spiritual armor to successfully fight ours. The Bible calls it the “Armor of God” and it tells us that we need the armor of God to protect us as we fight battles against Satan's evil schemes. The Armor of God is an amazing metaphor for actions we need to take in our spiritual lives. Paul drew this analogy from a Roman soldier’s battle attire. Paul saw that each piece of the soldier’s armor had a powerful correlation with our own spiritual defenses. It is this analogy that the church in Ephesus received and which God has preserved for nearly two thousand years for our benefit. Paul gave us the answer in Ephesians 6:13 — the call to arms.

When the apostle Paul describes the armor of God, he is talking about more than a simple set of helpful tips. He is talking about the impregnable defenses of the Almighty God. These are keys to withstanding the attacks and onslaughts of the great dragon of old, Satan the devil.

**The belt of truth** -

Paul chose to begin describing that set of armor by talking about...a belt? Why, of all things, a belt? He could have started with the mighty sword of the Spirit, the towering shield of faith, the shining breastplate of righteousness—anything but some measly old belt. But he didn't. So that begs the question—but why the belt?

In Roman times, the belt played a crucial role in the effectiveness of a soldier's armor. It was the belt that held the scabbard, without which there would be no place to put a sword. Imagine an overzealous soldier, fired up and charging out into battle—but without his belt, a soldier was effectively without any weapons! Take a look at the modern day warrior. If you look at a combat soldier you will see that the web-harness (belt) is the foundation of everything the soldier can carry. Without the belt, they have only their hands to hold weapons.

The world teaches us that truth is what we make it—that good and bad are relative and that there are no absolutes, only equally valid opinions. But the Bible teaches that truth is God's Word—that good and bad are defined by Him and that there are eternal and unchangeable absolutes, uninfluenced by opinions.

**The breastplate of righteousness** –

The breastplate was a central part of the Roman soldier's armor—it provided protection for the torso, which contains vital organs like the heart, lungs and so on. Without a breastplate, a soldier would be asking for death, as any attack could instantly become fatal. With a sturdy breastplate, the very same attacks become ineffective and useless, as blows glance off the armor. Soldiers today use bullet-proof armor and this same premise holds with our spiritual armor. To be righteous is to do what is right in God's eyes. God's commandments are righteousness. So to be righteous is to obey God's laws of love. Satan can never harm us when we protect our hearts and choose to do what God says is right.

**Feet fitted with the gospel of peace**

Shoes, like a belt, seem rather insignificant in a discussion about spiritual armor. But aren't they more of a convenience than a necessity? Are they really that important?
Imagine a fully armed soldier. He has his sword, his shield, his helmet, his breastplate and his belt...but his feet are completely bare. The picture probably seems strange, and it should! Just by thinking about it, we can tell something is missing.

But the problem goes beyond just looking odd. A shoeless soldier could run into real trouble in the heat of battle. Unless he is fighting on Astroturf, he is going to encounter some debris. It may be nothing more than twigs and pebbles, but to a bare foot that can cause serious pain—and one of the last things you want to deal with in the middle of a fight is worrying about where you step.

Having our shoes on, we are ready to move, to spread these glad tidings to others.

**The shield of faith** –

Up until now, Paul's description of the armor of God has been limited to items we wear. We put on the belt, the breastplate and the shoes, and they essentially hold themselves up.

The shield is different. Paul tells us that the shield is something we must take up, something we are required to raise. Just strapping it to our arm won't do any good at all if we don't make the effort to hold it aloft and use it.

A shield guards. While a physical shield protects us physically, faith can protect our spiritual lives even in the middle of physical trials. ...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

A shield deflects. Satan is always hurling his fiery darts of fear, doubt and worry in our direction, but the only time they can hit us is when we let our shield of faith down—when we stop believing that God is in control; that He is working everything out for our good; that whatever happens is for the ultimate best of everyone involved, however little it seems to be that way.

A shield is our first line of defense. While the rest of our armor helps protect us from it is not what you ideally want to be using to absorb every hit in battle. You do not, for instance, go out into battle intentionally blocking everything with your head.

When our faith in God is strong, it is impossible for Satan to break through our shield and land an attack. But when we allow doubt to creep in, as Peter did when distracted by the waves, we will start to sink. The rest of our armor will be battered, and so will we. But an actively raised shield of faith prevents this otherwise inhibiting fatigue.

**The helmet of salvation** –

It's hard to deny the importance of a helmet. *The Lansing State Journal* ran an article about a 36-year-old involved in a skateboarding accident:

"It was a death that could have been avoided, officials said."
"Paul Maxim, who was not wearing a helmet, suffered a skull fracture and other head injuries in an accident June 18 at Ranney Skate Park near Frandor. He died Saturday.

"'A simple helmet would have saved his life,' said Lansing fire public information officer Steve Mazurek."

This story stands in stark contrast with an article in the Manchester Evening News on about Savannah Haworth, 11, who was knocked unconscious after falling into the path of the car.

"The wheels went over her arm and top of her helmet but she escaped with a swollen elbow and bruising to her face.

"Her parents say she would have been killed without the helmet and are now urging all cyclists to wear them."

It's incredible to think that the absence or presence of a helmet can make so much of a difference that a skateboarding accident can prove fatal without one while being run over by a car can be survived with one. One of the pieces of our spiritual armor is the helmet of salvation, and, as we can see from these two stories, a helmet is not a piece of equipment to be underestimated.

Our enemy hates that we have chosen this path and will stop at nothing to destroy us because of it. Just as the helmet protects the vital but vulnerable head from otherwise fatal blows, the hope of salvation can protect our thoughts from our enemy's attacks and temptations to disobey God. Without the helmet of salvation, we will be unprotected from the "cares of this world" that bombard our thoughts and feelings. Imagine not knowing what the future ultimately holds. The worries and problems produced by living in this world would overwhelm us!

**The sword of the Spirit**

Throughout the world, there are certain individuals—real and fictional—whose identity remains almost inseparable from their weapons.

From England, there is King Arthur and his sword, Excalibur. From the Middle East, Ali and his scimitar, Zulfiqar. From Spain, El Cid and his long sword, Tizona. From Scotland, William Wallace and his unnamed claymore.

The sword is the only item listed by Paul that serves in an offensive capacity. Even if we have all the rest of the armor equipped perfectly, without our sword, we amount to little more than heavily armored moving targets.

The all-powerful sword of the living God is able to cut through every defense our enemy can raise—down to the very division of bone and marrow. When wielded by a servant of God, nothing can withstand its ability to cut straight to the core of a matter and uncover the truth. As soldiers in God's army, it is our responsibility and duty to use His Word to discern the truth and then follow it. When God's Word shows us something wrong in ourselves, we can use this spiritual weapon to "surgically" remove the offending thoughts and actions (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).
Unlike all other pieces of the armor of God, which are solely defensive, the sword is uniquely suited for both defensive and offensive roles. A solid defense is invaluable, but the sword is the only way we can complete the work we have been given to do.

Just as no catcher would ever think of getting behind the plate without his protective equipment no Christian should ever enter into the game of life without all of the protection that God has given us. Remember, Satan cannot harm us when we put on the "whole armor of God.

Most of us don’t realize that we’re in a very serious game going on for our souls, and that the enemy roams about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). We must always be on guard, realizing that many of the conflicts that come our way are simply not random incidents, but are traps the enemy has set for us, determined to destroy us and those around us. Not only must we be on guard for ambushes like this, we must be prepared to fight every step of the way.

Too many Christians today believe it's easier to pay the bully rather than learn how to defeat him. Might I also add that most of us don’t realize we are living on a BATTLEFIELD and not a PLAYGROUND!

That spiritual battle is being fought wherever Christian people are sharing the Word of God and wherever Churches are standing for the Word of God. That is the place the enemy wants to destroy, and there we find these spiritual battles.

I know that this sounds strange, but sometimes the most dangerous place you can be is in a church on Sunday morning. Where was the most dangerous place in Jerusalem the night Jesus was arrested? Was it with the Pharisees? Was it with the cutthroats of the underworld? No. The most dangerous place was in the Upper Room with Jesus. Do you know why? Because that was where the devil was that night. It is said that he entered into Judas Iscariot to betray Him. The devil was there. I believe both Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter would testify to the fact that that was the most dangerous place to have been that night in Jerusalem. We need to recognize where the battles are being fought.

So, what can we do? Stay alert in prayer, and soak yourself in the Scriptures; put on the mind of Christ; and shun everything that is not in accord with God’s will for you. Be careful of what your watch, what you listen to, and what you believe. Protect yourself from the lies of the devil, and whenever a lie of his is exposed, be prepared to cast it down and to destroy it with all your might. For, if you play with such thoughts and entertain them long enough, you may soon find yourself amongst the wounded and the dead

Put on the Armor of God and in doing so, you will not only become a strong Christian soldier, but also one who is capable of leading others into battle with a light that shines in an otherwise dark world.