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Teaching Letter

Defense Against Discouragement



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By Derek Prince

The first time I ever heard Billy Graham speak was in London in 1954. One thing he said at that service never left me. He said, "God never uses a discouraged Christian." I thought that over and concluded that was not really fair. Discouragement was definitely a problem I was facing in those days myself, and I thought it was not very nice for him to say that.

The example he gave was Gideon sitting behind the winepress, threshing the wheat and hiding in utter discouragement. The angel came to Gideon with the unexpected statement, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (Judges 6:12). Gideon surely looked around to see whom the angel was talking to, because he was cowering in fear from the Midianites. The Lord had to change Gideon's picture of himself before He could do anything with him.

The same is true of us. If we can't look at ourselves through the eyes of faith, then we are scarcely eligible for God's service. A wrong negative picture of ourselves will frustrate everything God wants to do for us unless we view things in a different light. Basically I want to talk to you about the Scripture's answer to discouragement and how to deal with that type of spiritual attack.

The equipment we need

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians are listed six items of military equipment: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. These are not just fancy names or theological subtleties. They are very practical realities which each of us needs to lay hold of. I want to take just two of those six items and give you some specific practical teaching from Scripture on how to resist the onslaught of spiritual discouragement.

> 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,

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> that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 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 6:12–17)

Based on my studies and on numerous modern translations, I believe that first verse might more accurately read this way: "For our wrestling match is not against persons with bodies." That is very vivid. In other words, we are not wrestling against human beings. Your mother-in-law is not the problem, nor even some dictator like Stalin or Hitler.

Our wrestling match is not against persons with bodies, but against rulers with realms of authority, against the world dominators of this present darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavens.

Put on your armor

We are involved in a total, all-out conflict with unseen spiritual persons who have tremendous power, who are highly organized, and who are totally opposed to us and to everything that stands for God and the people of God. Their headquarters is in the heavenlies, and they exert every type of spiritual pressure against us that will in any way bring us down. As a logical conclusion of that fact, Paul says in Ephesians 6:13, "You have to put on your armor. Otherwise you are going to be a casualty." That is a very logical, practical conclusion.

I would not recommend that anyone get involved in spiritual warfare or in building the Kingdom of God without first putting on the armor. Why? Because when you attack the devil, believe me, he will fightback, and he does not play according to the rules.

> Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day. (Ephesians 6:13)

Notice that Paul assumes the evil day is coming. I do not believe this refers to the Great Tribulation. It means that every Christian is going to go through his own particular evil day. When Jesus gave the parable of the two men who built houses, one on the rock and the other on the sand (Matthew 7:24–27), He did not say, "If the wind and rain come." He said, "When the wind and rain come." Each house was subjected to the same test.

When Jesus told the parable of the sower, He said, "When tribulation or persecution arise" (Matthew 13:21). He did not say "if." He took it for granted that persecution will come. Every Christian will have to go through the evil day when he has to face affliction and persecution. As Paul said in Acts 14:22, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." There is no other way.

So, first of all, we need to get that when fixed firmly in our minds. Remember that it doesn't mean something is wrong when we find ourselves in the evil day, under tremendous pressure. It doesn't mean we are out of God's will. On the contrary, it is probably a good indication that we are on the way into the Kingdom of God.

Of the six items of equipment Paul lists, I only want to talk about two: the breastplate and the shield. The other four are necessary, but for the purpose of this letter, I want to focus on the two I have mentioned. I want to explore in a very practical way—mainly out of personal experience—the use of the breastplate and the shield.

The Breastplate

To begin with, let's note an interesting parallel passage to part of Ephesians 6 in 1 Thessalonians 5:

> But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

Ephesians 6:14 says, the breastplate of righteousness, but 1 Thessalonians 5:8 tells us more specifically what that righteousness is. It's not the righteousness of self effort or good works but the righteousness of faith which works by love. (This theme of faith, by the way, is central to these items of equipment and also to the vital organs of the body which they protect.)

What vital organ of the body does the breastplate protect? The heart. The protection of the heart is the purpose of the breastplate of righteousness through faith which works by love. Bear in mind that scriptural faith is always in the heart,

not in the head. For instance, Romans 10:10 says, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness.” Real faith is not just intellectual concepts nor theology nor doctrine. It is heart faith which works along one primary line—love.

In conjunction with this, look at Galatians 5:6:

> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

That is a simple, yet profound, statement. We need to constantly remind ourselves that the only thing that really matters in the whole Christian life is faith that works by love. We can get so sophisticated that we have answers to all sorts of theological questions and still miss the one central reality—faith in the heart working by love. Without that, you have missed it all.

The breastplate that protects the heart is faith that works through love. Once the breastplate is removed, our most delicate vital organ, the heart, is exposed.

Concerning the nature of faith, we need to see that it always relates to the invisible, never to the visible. As 2 Corinthians 5:7 states very simply, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Walk means “live.” Our whole life as Christians is based not on what we see, but on what we believe. It is by faith, not by sight, and these two are in opposition to one another. If we go by what we see, we are not going by what we believe.

This whole issue was the very first mistake that humanity made. When the serpent in the Garden of Eden questioned the word of God, and Eve entertained that question, she was defeated. Genesis 3:6 tells us what pressure Eve responded to: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food.” The keyword there is saw. Eve moved out from the realm of faith in the invisible word to trusting her sight; the very next moment, she was defeated. This same principle applies to us. When we go by what we see, we are no match for the devil. We must walk by faith, not by sight.

The breastplate that protects our heart is faith in the invisible God and His word, and this faith works by love. The moment we abandon that faith, we cease to be truly loving. Some people say, “Love is more important than faith.” That may be, but the only way to love is by faith. Since faith works through love, it is no wonder we get irritable, frustrated, impatient, and snap at our spouses the moment we let the breastplate down. Our faith, which is the only thing that produces love, has gone. Consequently, out comes the old man with all its nasty quirks and idiosyncrasies. But what is the basic problem? The breastplate has been lowered.

The Shield

If the breastplate protects the heart, the shield protects the whole person. In the Roman era, if you knew how to manipulate a shield, there was no part of you that could be reached by the fiery dart. In the same way, the shield of faith protects the whole person.

Sometimes we misunderstand faith, thinking of it as something we have to be consciously doing all the time. "I must flex my spiritual muscles and believe.” But faith is not so much an action as it is an attitude of trust in God.

My late wife Lydia used to give the example of a little boy nestled in his father’s arms. The little boy would hold tightly onto the lapels of his father’s coat so that he wouldn’t fall, but after a while he would get sleepy and nod off. His hands would relax, but his father would still be holding him. The boy’s holding on to the lapels was really an unnecessary effort. That is like us with God. We can hold on, but even when we let go, God is still holding on.

In a certain sense, we can relax. Faith is not a continuous effort to hold on to God lest He get away. Instead, it is an attitude of just knowing God is there, and underneath are His everlasting arms. Along with that attitude, there is an affirmation of the faith you have.

You may have heard about the three Fs—a very familiar teaching. They are: Fact, Faith and Feeling, in that order. The facts are in the Bible, faith affirms those facts, and your feelings take care of themselves. But if we begin with our feelings, we will be as unstable as they are. Facts never change; feelings vary from moment to moment.

We cannot afford to base our faith on our feelings. Base your faith on the facts in the Word of God, which never change. They are the same hour by hour, day by day, year by year. To believe that requires a mental decision. Smith Wigglesworth once said, “I’m never moved by what I feel; only by what I believe.”

The only permanent, unchanging, valid source of facts is the Bible. Faith says, “The Bible is true and I believe it. God is here. He won’t let me go. My feelings can take care of themselves.” If you have that attitude, your feelings will come into line with the facts. But if you begin with your feelings, you’ll never get to the facts. It’s an absolute priority that you begin with the facts in the Word of God.

Knowing the facts

In order to do that, you have to know the facts. You have to be aware of what Scripture says.

For example, the fact of our redemption. The word to redeem means "to buy back." Scripture says that we were sold under sin in Satan's slave market, but Jesus redeemed us, or bought us back, out of Satan's slave market with His precious blood. Where does it state that fact? Psalm 107:2 says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy." The Lord has redeemed us so that we are no longer in the hand of the enemy but in the Lord's hands.

Then consider Colossians 1:12–14:

> Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

It is a fact that God has delivered us from the power of darkness—Satan's kingdom—and translated us into the Kingdom of Christ. Thus, we have redemption and our sins are forgiven. We are no longer in Satan's territory nor are we under His authority. The unbelieving, the Christ-rejecters, the rebellious and the disobedient are under Satan's legitimate authority. But we are not.

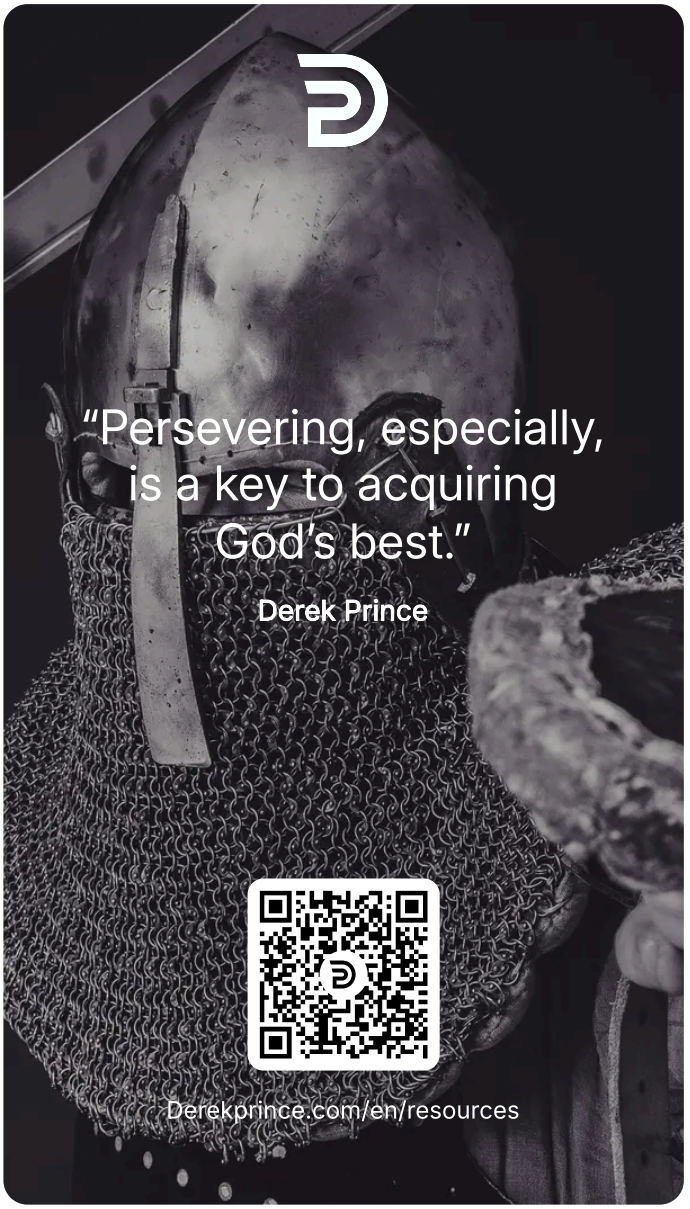
The fact is that when we repented and surrendered to Jesus Christ and made Him Lord, we were translated, carried over—spirit, soul, and body—out of the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of Christ.

These are facts. We believe facts from the invisible realm of His Word because we no longer go by our feelings. That shield of faith covers every area of our lives. No fiery dart need ever get past it.

We can see, then, that God has provided us with an effective defense for when the enemy tries to discourage us. When we remember to prepare ourselves daily by putting on these pieces of armor as a defense against the attacks that will surely come(and the other four as well), we will find God faithful to strengthen our faith and hope, enabling us to stand victoriously in His Spirit.

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