

# PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY Part 2: Progress in the Christian Life Chapter 6 THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMOUR

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## Transcript

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Part 2: Progress in the Christian Life

Chapter 6

THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMOUR

Ephesians 6:10-18

In the passage which is to be before us the apostle gathers up the whole previous subject of the epistle into an urgent reminder of the solemn conditions under which the Christian's life is lived. By a graphic figure he shows that the Christian's life is lived on the battlefield, for we are not only pilgrims but soldiers; we are not only in a foreign country, but in the enemy's land. Though the redemption which Christ has purchased for His people be free and full, yet, between the beginning of its application to us and the final consummation of it, there is a terrible and protracted conflict through which we have to pass. This is not merely a figure of speech, but a grim reality. Though salvation is free, yet it is not obtained without great effort. The fight to which God's children are called in this life is one in which Christians themselves receive many sore wounds, and thousands of professors are slain. Now, as we shall see in the verses which follow, the apostle warns us that the conflict has to do with more than human foes; the enemies we have to meet are superhuman ones, and therefore in order to fight successfully against them we need supernatural strength. We must remember that the Christian belongs to the spiritual realm as well as the natural, and so he has spiritual as well as natural foes; hence he needs spiritual strength as well as physical. Therefore the apostle begins here by saying, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (verse 10). The word "finally" denotes that the apostle had reached his closing exhortation, and the words "be strong" link up with what immediately precedes as well as with what now follows. Some of you will remember that the whole of the fifth chapter and the opening verses of the sixth chapter are filled with exhortations, and in order for the Christian to obey them he needs to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." "Finally, my brethren [after all the Christian duties I have set before you in the previous verses], "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." The words "be

strong" mean to muster strength for the conflict, and be strong "in the Lord" signifies that we must seek strength from the only source from which we can obtain it. Note carefully, it is not "be strong from the Lord," nor is it "be strengthened by the Lord." No, it is "be strong in the Lord." Perhaps you will get the thought if I use this analogy: just as a thumb that is amputated is useless, and just as a branch cut off from the vine withers, so a Christian whose fellowship with the Lord has been broken is in a strengthless, fruitless, useless state. Thus, "be strong in the Lord" means, first of all, see to it that you maintain a live practical relationship to and remain in constant communion with the Lord. It is deeply important that we should, ere we proceed farther, grasp the exhortation found in verse 10; otherwise there will be no strength for the conflict. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." At first sight there seems to be a needless repetition there; but it is not so. A soldier not only needs strength of body; he also needs courage, and that is what is in view in verse 10—the last clause brings in the thought of boldness. "Be strong": in faith, in hope, in wisdom, in patience, in fortitude, in every Christian grace. To be strong in grace is to be weak in sin. It is vitally essential to remember that we need to have our strength and courage renewed daily. Be strong in the Lord: seek His strength at the beginning of each day. God does not impart strength to us wholesale: He will not give us strength on Monday morning to last through the week. No, there has to be the renewing of our strength and that strength has to be drawn from the Lord by the actings of faith, appropriating from His "fulness." "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (verse 11). Our first need is to stir up ourselves to resist temptation by a believing reliance upon God's all-sufficient grace, that is obtaining from Him the strength which will enable us to go forth and fight against the foe. Our second greatest need is to be well armed for the conflict into which we must daily enter. This is the relation between verses 10 and 11: "Be strong in the Lord" and "Put on the whole armor of God": first, stir up yourselves to resist temptation, seeking strength at the beginning of the day for the conflict; then see to it that you take unto yourselves, put on, the whole armor of God. The Christian is engaged in a warfare. There is a fight before him, hence armor is urgently needed. It is impossible for us to stand against the wiles of the Devil unless we avail ourselves of the provision which God has made for enabling us to stand. Observe that it is called the "armor of God": just as the strength we need comes not from ourselves, but must be supplied by the Lord, so our means of defence lie not in our own powers and faculties, but only as they are quickened by God. It is called the "armor of God" because He both provides and bestows it, for we have none of our own; and yet, while this armor is of God's providing and bestowing, we have to put it on! God does not fit it on us; He places it before us; and it is our responsibility, duty, task, to put on the whole armor of God. Now it is very important that we should recognize that this term "armor" is a figurative one, a metaphor, and refers not to something which is material or carnal. It is a figurative expression denoting the Christian's graces, and when we are told to "put on" the armor it simply means we are to call into exercise and action our graces. Those who wish to approve themselves of being in possession of grace must see to it that they have all the graces of a saint. "Put on the whole armor of God, that [in order that] ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." There is no standing against him if we are not armored. On the other hand, there is no failing and falling before him if our graces are healthy and active. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (verse. 12). The opening "for" has the force of "because": the apostle is advancing a reason, which virtually amounts to an argument, so as to enforce the exhortation just given. Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, not against puny human enemies no stronger than ourselves, but against the powers and rulers of the darkness of this world, the panoply of God is essential. That is brought in to emphasize the terribleness of the conflict before us. It is no imaginary one, and no ordinary foes we have to meet; but spiritual, superhuman, invisible ones. Those

enemies seek to destroy faith and produce doubt. They seek to destroy hope and produce despair. They seek to destroy humility and produce pride. They seek to destroy peace and produce bitterness and malice. They seek to prevent our enjoyment of heavenly things by getting us unduly occupied with earthly things. Their attack is not upon the body, but upon the soul. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (verse 13). The opening "wherefore" means that, in view of the fact that we wrestle against these powerful, superhuman, invisible foes, who hate us with a deadly hatred and are seeking to destroy us, therefore appropriate and use the provision which God has made, so that we may stand and withstand. The first clause of verse 13 explains the opening words of verse 11. Verse 11 says "put on," make use of all proper weapons for repulsing the attacks, and verse 13 says "take unto you the whole armor of God"; we "put on" by taking it "unto us," that is, by appropriation, by making it our own. "That ye may be able to withstand": to withstand is the opposite of yielding, of being tripped up, thrown down, by the Devil's temptations; it means that we stand our ground, resist the Devil. "That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand": the "stand" is the opposite of a slothful sleep, or a cowardly flight. I want you to notice that we are not told to advance. We are only ordered to "stand." God has not called His people to an aggressive war upon Satan, to invade his territory, and seek to wrest from him what is his; He has told us to occupy the ground which He has allotted us. I want you to see what would have been implied had this verse said, "Take unto you the whole armor of God, and advance upon the devil, storm his strongholds, liberate his prisoners." But not so; the Lord has given no charge or commission to the rank and file of His people to engage in what is now called "personal work," "soul winning," rescuing the perishing." All such feverish activities of the flesh as we now behold in the religious world find no place in this Divine exhortation. This is the third time in these verses that the Spirit of God has repeated that word "stand"—not advance, not rush hither and thither, like a crazy person. "Stand therefore" is all God has told us to do in our conflict with the Devil. "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth." Now that brings before us the first of the seven pieces of the Christian's armor mentioned in this passage. First, let me warn you against the canalization of this word, thinking of something that is external, visible, or tangible. The figure of the "girdle" is taken from a well-known custom in oriental countries, where the people all wear long, flowing outer garments reaching to the feet, which would impede the actions when walking, working or fighting. The first thing a person does there when about to be active is to gird up around his waist that outer garment which tails to the ground. When the garment is not girded and hangs down, it indicates that the person is at rest. To "gird up" is therefore the opposite of sloth and ease. Be girdled about with a girdle of truth: I believe there is a double reference or meaning here in the word "truth." But first of all I want to take up what it is that we need to "gird." The breastplate is for the heart, the helmet for the head; what, then, is the "girdle" for? In that form from which the figure is borrowed, the reference is to the waist or loins. But what does that metaphor denote? Plainly the center or mainspring of all our activities. And what is that? Obviously the mind is the mainspring of action: first the thought, and then the carrying out of it. 1 Peter 1:13, helps us here: "gird up the loins of your mind." "Let your loins be girt about with truth": it is not so much our embracing the truth as the truth embracing us. Thus, the spiritual reference is to the holiness in and regulation of the thoughts of the mind. The mind "girded up" means a mind which is disciplined; the opposite of one where the thoughts are allowed to run loose and wild. Again, the "loins" are the place of strength, so is the mind. If we allow our thoughts and imaginations to run wild, we will have no communion with God, and no power against Satan. "Having your loins girt about with truth." I think the word "truth" has reference, in the first place, to the Word of God: "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). That is what must regulate the mind, control the thoughts, subdue the imaginations: there must be a knowledge of, faith in, love for, subjection to, God's Word. "Stand, therefore, having your loins [your mind] girt about with truth."

Now that suggests to us the characteristic quality of the adversary against whom we are called upon to arm. Satan is a liar, and we can only meet him with the Truth. Satan prevails over ignorance by means of guile or deceit; but he has no power over those whose minds are regulated by the Truth of God. I think the word "truth" here has a second meaning. Take for example Psalm 51:6, God "desireth truth in the inward parts": "truth" there signifies reality, sincerity. Truth is the opposite of hypocrisy, pretence, unreality. That is why the girdle of truth comes first, because it being lacking, everything else is vain and useless. The strength of every grace lies in the sincerity of it. In 1 Timothy 1:5, we read "faith unfeigned," which means true, genuine, real faith; in contrast with a faith which is only theoretical, notional, lifeless, inoperative—a faith which utterly withers before the fires of testing. The girdle of truth (corresponding to the military belt of the warrior) signifies, then, the mind being regulated by real sincerity; and this alone will protect us against Satan's temptations unto slackness and guile and hypocrisy. Only as this is "put on" by us shall we be able to "stand against the wiles of the devil": to "stand" is to "resist" that he does not throw us down. The second part or piece of the Christian's armor is mentioned in verse 14: "and having on the breastplate of righteousness." First of all, notice the connecting "and," which intimates that there is a very close relation between the mind being girded with truth and the heart protected with the breastplate of righteousness. All of these seven pieces of armor are not so connected, but the "and" here between the first two denotes that they are inseparably united. Now, obviously, the breastplate of righteousness is that protection which we need for the heart. This verse is closely parallel to Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thine heart with all diligence," understanding by the "heart" the affections and conscience. As there was a double reference in the word "truth," first to the Word of God and second to the sincerity of spirit, so I believe there is a double reference here in the breastplate of righteousness." I think it refers both to that righteousness which Christ wrought out for us and that righteousness which the Spirit works in us—both the righteousness which is imputed and the righteousness which is imparted—which is what we need if we are to withstand the attacks of Satan. We might compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8: "Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love." I have been quite impressed of late in noting how frequently that word "sober" occurs in the Epistles, either in its substantive or verbal form. Soberness is that which should characterize and identify the people of God. It is the opposite of that superficial flightiness which is one of the outstanding marks of worldlings today. It is the opposite of levity, and also of that feverish restlessness of the flesh by which so many are intoxicated religiously and every other way. This second piece of armor, as I have said, is inseparably connected with the girdle of truth, for sincerity of mind and holiness of heart must go together. To put on the breastplate of righteousness means to maintain the power of holiness over our affections and conscience. A verse that helps us to understand this is Acts 24:16, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men." There you have an illustration of a man taking unto himself, putting on, the "breastplate of righteousness." We pass on to the third piece of armor. "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (verse 15). This is perhaps the most difficult of the seven pieces of armor to understand and define; and yet, if we hold fast the first thought, that the Holy Spirit is using a figure of speech here, that the reference is to that which is internal rather than external, spiritual rather than material, and also that He is following a logical order, there should not be much difficulty in ascertaining what is meant by the sandals of peace. Just as the girdle of truth has to do with the mind, the breastplate of righteousness with the heart, so the shoes for the feet area figure of that which concerns the will. At first sight that may sound far-fetched, and yet if we will think for a moment it should be obvious that what the feet are to the body the will is to the soul. The feet carry the body from place to place, and the will is that which directs the activities of the soul; what the will decides, that is what we do. Now the will is to be regulated by the peace of the Gospel. What is meant by that? This: in becoming reconciled to God and in having good will to our fellows the Gospel is the means

or instrument that God uses. We are told in Psalm 110:3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power": that means far more than that they shall be ready to hearken to and believe the glad tidings of the Gospel. There is brought over into the Gospel substantially everything which was contained in both the moral and ceremonial Law. The Gospel is not only a message of good news, but a Divine commandment and rule of conduct: "For the time is come that judgment must [not "shall"—now, not in the future] begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end of them be that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). The Gospel requires us to deny ourselves, take up the cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of unreserved obedience to God. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" signifies that you must with alacrity and readiness respond to God's revealed will. The peace of "the gospel" comes from walking in subjection to its terms and by fulfilling the duties which it prescribes. Just so far as we are obedient to it we experimentally enjoy its peace. Thus, this third piece of armor is for fortifying the will against Satan's temptations unto self-will and disobedience, and this by subjection to the Gospel. Just as the feet are the members which convey the body from place to place, so the will directs the soul; and just as the feet must be adequately shod if we are to walk properly and comfortably, so the will must be brought into subjection unto the revealed will of God if we are to enjoy His peace. Let there be that complete surrender daily, the dedicating of ourselves to God, and then we will be impervious unto Satan's attacks and temptations to disobedience. You will take notice when we come to the fourth piece of armor that the "and" is lacking. The first three were joined together, for that which is denoted by those figurative terms is inseparably linked together—the mind, the heart, the will: there you have the complete inner man. "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (verse 16). I think the words "above all" have a double force. First, literally, understanding them as a preposition of place, meaning over all, shielding as a canopy, protecting the mind, the heart and the will. There must be faith in exercise if those three parts of our inner being are to be guarded. Second, "above all" may be taken adverbially, signifying chiefly, pre-eminently, supremely. It is an essential thing that you should take the shield of faith, for Hebrews 11:6, tells us, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him." Yes, even if there were sincerity, love, and a pliable will, yet without faith we could not please Him. Therefore, "above all" take unto you the shield of faith. Faith is all in all in resisting temptation. We must be fully persuaded of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures if we are to be awed by their precepts and cheered by their encouragements; we will never heed properly the Divine warnings or consolations unless we have explicit confidence in their Divine authorship. The whole victory is here ascribed to faith "above all"; it is not by the breastplate, helmet or sword, but by the shield of faith that we are enabled to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. It seems to be a general principle in the Spirit's arrangement of things in Scripture to put the most vital one in the center; we have seven pieces of armor, and the shield of faith is the fourth. So in Hebrews 6:4-6, we have five things mentioned, and in the middle is "made partakers of the Holy Spirit." Faith is the life of all the graces. If faith be not in exercise, love, hope, patience cannot be. Here we find faith intended for the defence of the whole man. The shield of the soldier is something he grips, and raises or lowers as it is needed. It is for the protection of his entire person. Now the figure which the Holy Spirit uses here in connection with Satan's attacks is taken from one of the devices of the ancients in their warfare, namely the use of darts which had been dipped in tar and set on fire, in order to blind their foes: that is what lies behind the metaphor of "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked"; it has in view Satan's efforts to prevent our looking upward! When these darts were in the air the soldiers had to bow their heads to avoid them, holding their shields above. And Satan is constantly seeking to prevent our looking upward. The attacks of the Devil are likened to "fiery darts," first, because of the wrath with which he shoots them. There is intense hatred in Satan against the child of God. Again, the very essence of his temptations is to inflame the passions and distress the conscience. He aims to

kindle covetousness, to excite worldly ambition, to ignite our lusts. In James 3:6, we read, "the tongue is set on fire of hell"—that means the Devil's "fiery darts" have affected it. Thirdly, his temptations are likened unto "fiery darts" because of the end to which they lead if not quenched; should Satan's temptations be followed out to the end they would land us in the lake of fire. The figure of "darts" denotes that his temptations are swift, noiseless, dangerous. Now taking the shield of faith means appropriating the Word and acting on it. The shield is to protect the whole person, wherever the attack be made, whether on spirit, or soul, or body; and there is that in the Word which is exactly suited unto each, but faith must lay hold of and employ it. Now in order to use the shield of faith effectually the Word of Christ needs to dwell in us "richly" (Col. 3:16). We must have right to hand a word which is pertinent for the particular temptation presented. For example, if tempted unto covetousness, we must use "Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth"; when solicited by evil companions, "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not"; if tempted to harshness, "Be kindly affectioned one to another." It is because the details of Scripture have so little place in our meditations that Satan trips us so frequently. Like most of the other terms used, "faith" here also has a double signification. The faith which is to be our "shield" is both an objective and a subjective one. It has reference, first, to the Word of God without, the authority of which is ever binding upon us. It points, secondly, to our confidence in that Word, the heart going out in trustful expectation to the Author of it, and counting upon its efficacy to repulse the Devil. "And take the helmet of salvation" (verse 17). This is the fifth piece of the Christian's armor. First of all we may note the link between the fourth and fifth pieces as denoted by the word "and," for this helps us to define what the "helmet of salvation" is; it is linked with faith! Hebrews 11:1, tells us, "faith is the substance of things hoped for," and if we compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8, we get a confirmation of that thought: "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation." Here in Thessalonians, then, we have "hope" directly connected with "the helmet." Incidentally, this verse is one of many in the New Testament which puts salvation in the future rather than in the past! Hope always looks forward, having to do with things to come; as Romans 8:25, tells us, "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." Now faith and hope are inseparable: they are one in birth, and one in growth; and, we may add, one in decay. If faith languish, hope is listless. By the helmet of salvation, then, I understand the heart's expectation of the good things promised, a well-grounded assurance that God will make good to His people those things which His Word presents for future accomplishment. We might link up with this 1 John 3:3—scriptural hope purifies. It delivers from discontent and despair, it comforts the heart in the interval of waiting. Satan is unable to get a Christian to commit many of the grosser sins which are common in the world, so he attacks along other lines. Often he seeks to cast a cloud of gloom over the soul, or produce anxiety about the future. Despondency is one of his favorite weapons, for he knows well that "the joy of the Lord" is our strength" (Neh. 8:10), hence his frequent efforts to dampen our spirits. To repulse these, we are to "take the helmet of salvation": that is, we are to exercise hope—anticipate the blissful future, look forward unto the eternal rest awaiting us; look away from earth to heaven! "And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (verse 17). God has provided His people with an offensive weapon as well as defensive ones. At first sight that may seem to clash with what we said about Christians not being called upon to be aggressive against Satan, seeking to invade his territory and wrest it from him. But this verse does not clash to the slightest degree. 2 Corinthians 7:1, gives us the thought: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit": that is the active, aggressive side of the Christian's warfare. We are not only to resist our lusts but to subdue and overcome them. It is significant to note how late the "sword of the Spirit" is mentioned in this list. Some have thought that it should have come first, but it is not mentioned until the sixth. Why? I believe there is a twofold reason. First, because all the other graces that have been mentioned are necessary to make a

right use of the Word. If there is not a sincere mind and a holy heart we shall only handle the Word dishonestly. If there is not practical righteousness, then we shall only be handling the Word theoretically. If there is not faith and hope we shall only misuse it. All the Christian graces that are figuratively contemplated under the other pieces of armor must be in exercise before we can profitably handle the Word of God. Second, it teaches us that even when the Christian has attained unto the highest point possible in this life he still needs the Word. Even when he has upon him the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, his feet shod with the shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and has taken unto himself the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, he still needs the Word! The last piece of armor is given in verse 18: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Prayer is that which alone gives us the necessary strength to use the other pieces of armor! After the Christian has taken unto himself those six pieces, before he is thoroughly furnished to go forth unto the battle and fitted for victory, he needs the help of his General. For this, the apostle bids us pray "always" with all supplication in the Spirit. We are to fight upon our knees! Only prayer can keep alive the different spiritual graces which are figured by the various pieces of armor. "Praying always": in every season—in times of joy as well as sorrow, in days of adversity as well as prosperity. Not only so, but "watching thereunto with all perseverance": that is one of the essential elements in prevailing prayer—persistence. Watch yourself that you do not let up, become slack or discouraged. Keep on! The eighteenth verse is as though the apostle said, "Forget not to seek unto the God of this 'armor' and make humble supplication for His assistance; for only He who has given us these arms can enable us to make a successful use of them." Some have called it the "all verse." "Praying always with all prayer . . . with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints"—think not only of yourself, but also of your fellow soldiers who are engaged in the same conflict!

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