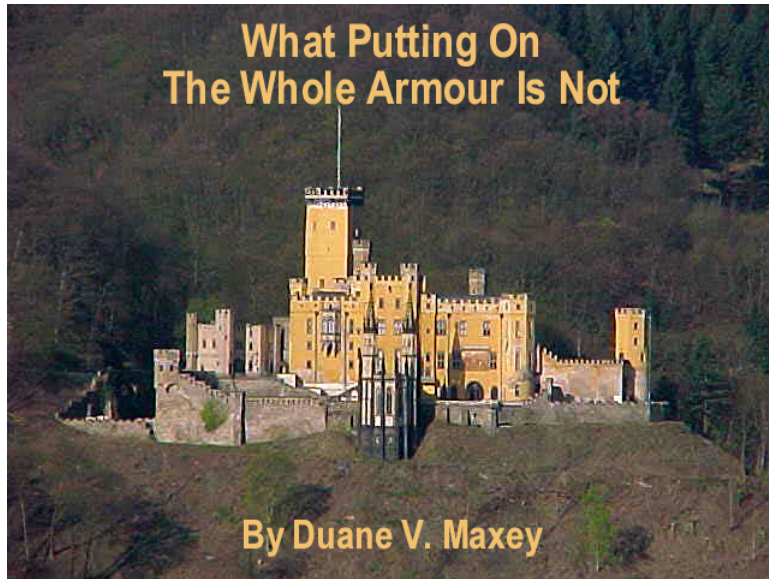


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WHAT PUTTING ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR IS NOT
By Duane V. Maxey



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Digital Edition 01/09/07
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SCRIPTURES

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Ephesians 6:11, 13).

"And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings 20:11).

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WHAT PUTTING ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR IS NOT

"Did you get the victory?"

This is a question often asked one who has been seeking at a church altar service. It is a legitimate question, but sometimes it may give the wrong impression -- viz., that praying through to an experience of salvation and entire sanctification is tantamount to winning the Christian warfare.

The exhortation to "put on the whole armour of God" or "take unto you the whole armour of God" is sometimes used by holiness preachers to urge the saved to obtain the experience of entire sanctification.

This makes good preaching. In ancient warfare, lighter armour was sometimes used by some soldiers, while the "heavy troops" armed themselves with "the whole armour" available to them. This lends itself to the thought of those who are saved being the "light troops" -- equipped only with partial armour -- versus those who are sanctified wholly being the "heavy troops" who have "put on the whole armour of God."

Also, there were two stages when some ancient warriors put on their armour. The first stage involved putting on the body an arming doublet, which was a padded garment with fastener points to which the outer armour could be attached. The whole, outer armour could not be put on without first having put on the inner doublet.

This too could be used to illustrate how there are two stages in putting on the whole armour of God -- the first stage being the born-again experience, equaling the inner doublet -- the second stage being the baptism of the Holy Spirit, equaling the whole armour fastened to and attached to the inner doublet.

This all makes good preaching. The preacher might say, "You need to first put on the inner doublet, but this piece of the armour is obviously imperfect, being designed for and demanding that the outer, whole armour, be attached to it. So likewise the first work of grace demands that the second work of grace be attached to it, thus equipping the Christian with "the whole armour of God." One might also elaborate upon the fact that the outer -- "whole armour" -- cannot be put on without having first put on the inner doublet -- there being no proper clothing upon the would-be soldier's body to which the whole armour could be attached.

Putting on armour in ancient times involved quite a process, taking fifteen minutes or more, and the warrior required the help of an armour-bearer to help him get into it. The preacher might use this fact to illustrate how seekers need the help of the Holy Spirit -- He is the Heavenly Armor-Bearer, and only He can place upon the seeker "the whole armour of God."

There is indeed some very good preaching in the Scriptures related to putting on armour. Another passage that uses this metaphor is Romans 13:12-14 -- "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us PUT ON THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But PUT YE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

One could again suggest from the above that to "put on the armour of light" is equivalent to "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" in the first work of grace.

And, relative to putting on "the armour of light" one could mention that this cannot be done by one who wants to "shine" in pride. One of my sources for this article says: "It's interesting to note that most Roman armour probably did not shine. They used a lot of chain mail (a sort of cloth made of circular links), which doesn't shine. They also made scale armour (metal plates about 3 inches long and about an inch wide, sewn together on a linen/leather backing.) Scale armour shines a little, but not much. And, they made leather armour, with the metal on

the inside, or at least under the leather, probably again on a backing of linen, to make three layers. So, although the ancient Romans loved the ornate and glittery, their armour most probably did not shine!"

Putting on "the armour of light" in order to "shine" in the eyes of the world is an impossibility, for one cannot truly "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" with such a motive. Neither work of divine grace is given to make a person appear like "a knight in shining armour" to the world. In fact, in the eyes of the world, the grace of God in one's life may often appear to be a very dull thing -- nothing like the glitter of the world. Yes, there is an aspect of God-given grace that "shines" but "the whole armour of God" is not something to be "put on parade" but rather that which is given the child of God to "go to war" and win the battle.

This brings me back to the main point of this article: PUTTING ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD IS NOT EQUIVALENT TO WINNING THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE!

It is true that getting saved and/or getting sanctified wholly is "getting the victory" in a very real sense. But, this must never be thought of as "winning the Christian warfare"! Indeed, putting on the armour of God is only the necessary preparation for entering the Christian warfare -- not the equivalent to being finally victorious therein.

After the ancient warrior had been assisted into the inner doublet and the outer, whole armour, can you imagine his answer if someone asked him: "DID YOU GET THE VICTORY?" If he was sensible and humble, he would reply: "WHY NO! I HAVE NOT YET EVEN GONE TO BATTLE! HOW COULD I HAVE THE VICTORY!?"

Too often in holiness churches, putting on the armour of God is so equated to "getting the victory" that inwardly folks can begin to confuse putting on the armour with winning the Christian warfare. Great emphasis is sometimes placed upon the struggle necessary to put on the whole armour of God -- almost as if THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN'S MAIN BATTLE: -- Get into the whole armour of God, and you've got it made; nothing will be able to defeat you once you have successfully struggled into this armour. Indeed, so much emphasis can be placed upon the struggle necessary to get into the whole armour that the main reason for putting it on fades into the background in the minds of those

seeking the experience! Thus, some seekers spend years trying to get into the armour and trying to make sure they have it on, so that THEY NEVER DO GET OUT INTO REAL CHRISTIAN WARFARE!

What would an ancient Roman General have said to a legion of his soldiers who laid so much emphasis upon getting on the whole armour that they failed to go to the battle? Doubtless he would have informed them that THEIR EMPHASIS WAS IN THE WRONG PLACE! -- and that while they must get that armour on, and get it on right, they must do so with dispatch and then hasten into the battlefield, FOR THE VICTORY IS NOT GAINED BY MERELY GETTING ON THE WHOLE ARMOR!

When undue emphasis is placed upon "getting the victory" by "putting on the whole armour of God," then many never get out into real Christian warfare, and the church becomes nothing more than an "Armor Dressing Room" for soldiers who never go to war, but who spend all of their time making sure they have the armour on -- wholly, and rightly. Obviously, satan has sidetracked and sidelined a church where this misplaced emphasis is the case, and he need not fear those soldiers doing any damage to his kingdom.

But another sad consequence of over-emphasizing "getting the victory" by "putting on the whole armour" can be the presumption that once one has on that whole armour he or she has become invulnerable -- so protected when going out into battle that victory is assured in advance.

And, Holiness preachers CAN, and DO sometimes give this impression in their sermons and exhortations. This fosters presumption.

Benhadad, king of Syria, presumed that he had won the battle against Israel, merely by his having put on his armour. But, his opponent, "the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings 20:11).

Nevertheless, Benhadad paid no mind to this admonition, and in drunken revelry celebrated his victory before the battle began. (cf. 1 Kings 20:16). Then, when the battle occurred the forces of Benhadad

were routed, and he had to flee the scene of the conflict in order to avoid being slain.

Likewise, it is possible to become so "drunken on Canaan wine" -- so joyful in having put on the whole armour of God -- that one feels hilarious and victorious before ever going into real Christian warfare! Thus, more than one sanctified, but presumptuous Christian has suffered humiliating defeat as the result. No Christian should presume that Satan is defeated -- once and for all -- simply because the whole armour of God has been put on. Martin Luther's hymn is good instruction for the would-be soldier of the Cross:

"For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His art and craft are great,
And armed with cruel hate--
On earth is not his equal."

When I was a young preacher, one day I was praying at the church with an older evangelist. The blessing of God was upon my soul, and I shouted the victory. Wisely, the evangelist quoted part of Psalm 2:11 to me: "Rejoice with trembling." I was not conscious of any presumptuous spirit in my rejoicing, but still -- that was good, sound advice.

Those who have put on the whole armour of God should not rejoice as if their final battle against the devil has been won. The finally victorious saints' armour is removed at death -- not before.

Furthermore, one must not assume that the whole armour of God eliminates all possibility of being spiritually wounded and slain. When the king of Israel went up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, he had been forewarned of God through the prophet Micaiah: "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you" (1 Kings 22:28). This warning was ignored, and when the king of Israel went into the battle, "a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded" (1 Kings 22:34).

And, he died -- not because he did not have on his armour in the battle, but -- because he failed to heed the divine warning. The enemy's arrow hit the mark right at the point of his vulnerability -- the joint between two pieces of his armour!

Even the wholly sanctified are still human, and the devil knows just where the weakest, most vulnerable spot is in one's being. Had the king of Israel followed the divine warning, he had not died, but because he trusted in his armour more than in God's Word, he was struck at that one vulnerable spot and died!

Is there not a lesson here? While putting on the whole armour of God is divinely required, one must not trust that experience to protect from the assaults of hell -- if one disregards God's Word. It is not an experience that saves and protects, but God.

Finally, having put on the whole armour of God will not protect when one begins to disdain small things and begins to feel that little things can't bring defeat. When this occurs, spiritual pride has entered in.

The mammoth Goliath stood "six cubits and a span" tall; he "had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him" (1 Sam 17:4-7).

When the diminutive David approached him on the field of battle, Goliath's height was only exceeded by his pride and disdain for the little lad. In his great size, with his great strength, and in his whole armour, how could this little flea harm him!?

But David was as skilled at slinging stones as the lefthanded men of Benjamin, of whom it is written: "every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss" (Judges 20:16).

You know the story: "David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead,

that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth" (1 Sam. 17:49).

He was a giant, but Goliath thought "of himself more highly than he ought to think" instead of "soberly" (Rom. 12:3). Little David "taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11:22). Whether it be in a boasting giant, or in one who spiritually thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

"Who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10) -- not only boasting Goliaths, but some who, having put on the whole armour of God, have begun to think that little things can never down them and "little foxes" can never spoil their vine (cf. Song of Sol. 2:15).

No matter how large one has become spiritually, no matter how huge the church organization to which one belongs, no matter how experienced one is in spiritual battle, merely having on "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (2 Cor. 6:7) does not mean that one is guaranteed the final victory on the field of battle.

David said in Psalm 44:6 -- "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. In the final analysis, no experience of divine grace alone, no matter how necessary it is, can protect the Christian's soul and bring a final triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Only God can do that.

Putting on the whole armour of God must not be taken to mean that one has "already attained" victory in every spiritual battle to come, "either were already perfect" -- having won the final triumph (Philippians 3:12). As long as life and moral accountability last, "there is no discharge" from the Christian warfare (Eccl. 8:8). Therefore, until one's promotion to glory, the divine caution always remains: "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings 20:11).

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THE END