

Defend Your Faith - Jim Palmer

“Armor-Up”

In August 2003, the Boston Red Sox, coming off of a loss to the Oakland A's, seemed destined to limp either home or possibly into the wild card of baseball's American League. But then came the rallying cry. Credited to first baseman, Kevin Millar, and relief pitcher, Mike Timlin, “**Cowboy-up**” became the expression that epitomized a band of tough ballplayers that kept getting knocked down but kept dusting off and getting up. After the loss, Millar said it was time for the team to “cowboy-up.” Then he had to explain. Hailing from Texas, Millar and Timlin had no difficulty translating the rodeo term for the Boston media. “In rodeo, to ‘cowboy-up’ means to suck it up in times of adversity; No boo-hooing; No namby-pamby fatalism,” wrote Joseph Kahn of the Boston Globe. And, seemingly from out of nowhere that Red Sox team got themselves together and went on a tear that got them to within five outs of the World Series in '03; and then saw them win it all in 2004.

The main stream media thinks Christians are ignorant, weak-minded, and wimpy, or else we're somehow fiendishly clever enough to be the cause of wars, poverty, and who knows, maybe global warming. We live in a society that wants to remove God from every mind in favor of the gods of secularism, materialism, atheism, and humanism. And all too often we sit in the comfort of our padded pews, listen to God's word proclaimed, and promptly leave the church building to blend into the world in such a way that the world wouldn't know we were Christians. If you want to make a difference, if you want to make this world a better place for yourself and your children and grandchildren, if you want to help a lost and dying world find the salvation that is in Christ, and if you want to defend your faith, isn't it time we did something similar to the 2003 Red Sox? Isn't it time for us to “**Armor-up?**”

In Ephesians 6, beginning with verse 10, Paul admonished the Christians in Ephesus and ultimately us, to do exactly that. He wrote, “Finally, my brethren, **be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put 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.” It is my hope and prayer that we will, as Christians, “armor-up” and defend our faith. Only when we are supplied with the proper battle gear will we be effective in our efforts for Christ. And let us notice, our battle is not in the physical realm, our struggle is within each mind – a battle taking place in the marketplace of ideas.

In order for us to defend our faith in an effective and productive manner – in a manner which would befit an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), we must take on the attributes listed in the remaining verses of Ephesians 6. We must put on **truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God.** We must apply **all** of it; “*take up the whole armor of God...*” He has given us all things pertaining both to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Will you armor-up and engage or will you sit

idly by while the world and its lost inhabitants perish? Let's briefly consider the six items mentioned when referring to the armor we need as Christians.

What is truth? Pilate asked that question of Jesus in John 18:38. It seems based on the text that he didn't wait for or listen to any answer Christ might have given because he went on with his business of appeasing the mob. But shouldn't we know the answer to that question? We have truth "on our side" and it seems to me that for us to effectively defend our faith, we need to have it "at our side." In other words, we need to know it! The Psalmist declared, "Through *Your precepts* I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. *Your word* is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (119:104-105). "Give me understanding according to *Your word*" (119:169). And, "***the entirety of Your word is truth***, and every one of your judgments endures forever" (119:160). God's word is the Truth in which we can put all of our hope and trust. We can with boldness and confidence approach our battle if we have truth at our side.

"For he made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). We must put on the breastplate of righteousness if our efforts will be effective. Each one of us can, through Christ who strengthens, exhibit qualities of righteousness – not just in word, but in deed. When we take up our cross *daily* (Luke 9:23-26) and when we crucify that old man of sin (Romans 6:6-7) then we may confidently wear that breastplate of righteousness which Paul tells is part of the whole armor of God.

The gospel, the good news informing mankind of the pending salvation available to all (Titus 2:11-14), is without a doubt a necessary piece of the armor of God. The gospel teaches us about our Savior, describes to us his sufferings, reminds us of His sacrificial love, and educates us about His desire that we put Him on in baptism (cf. Romans 6:3-5; 13:12-14) and walk in the light as he is in the light (1 John 1:7-10). The gospel of peace provides us with the necessary assurance that we can have a relationship with the Savior and reminds of the peace that will come to one who serves Him faithfully.

Faith will carry us above the fray of the world and help us to see a brighter future both here and in the hereafter. Faith will cause us to see things as they could be rather than focusing only on how they are today. And faith will cause us to take action when we know that there is something we should be doing. When we look at society today isn't it easy to lose hope? Do you ever feel as though your faith might be wavering and your convictions faltering? It's time to shore up your faith! Does our situation not in some ways parallel Abraham's? Consider Romans 4:18-25 which reminds us that Abraham believed in hope – even *contrary to* hope, was not weak in faith, did not waver, was fully convinced, and as such his actions were accounted to him as righteousness. When our faith begins to slip, we can regain our footing by spending time in His word, in prayer, and in fellowship with fellow Christians. The devil's fiery darts are no match for a strong shield of faith.

As for the helmet of salvation, it is invaluable! How confidently will we defend our faith when we have the assurance of our salvation? That we can know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13) goes a long way toward protecting our hearts and minds during spiritual warfare. Satan will use every means possible to bring us down and doubt will destroy

our best efforts to serve in the Lord's army. But we are more than conquerors through Christ. We place our trust in Christ as our Savior. With Him and through Him we can stand boldly for the faith once delivered!

And finally, may we each one gain the ability to take up the sword of the Spirit. May we daily train (Hebrews 5:13-14) in such a way that we will be able to use the Word of God effectively. May we understand the gravity of its power (Hebrews 4:12) and use it cautiously. May we like Paul, have confidence in its truth and teach it courageously (Acts 28:30-31). And by it may we ourselves be convicted of our sin (John 16:8) and convinced of the need for application of its precepts in our lives.

Are you prepared to defend your faith? Are you ready for battle? Until we decide to "armor-up" we will be a listless and lethargic army. If need be, start over right now. Make it a daily habit to put on the whole armor of God. You're needed in the battle. You can make a difference if you will defend your faith.