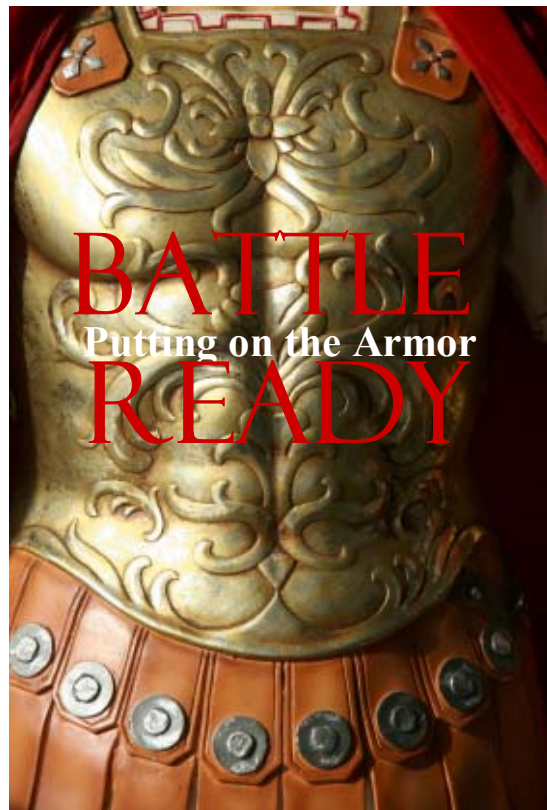


*The Covenant Pulpit*



**BATTLE**  
Putting on the Armor  
**READY**

***"Battle for the Mind"***  
**Receiving the Helmet of Salvation**

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## Introduction: *Losing Our Minds*

*Christians without Christian minds* is one of the greatest problems facing the Church today. Some prophetic voices have been sounding the alarm for some time now. In 1980, the former United Nations Secretary General Charles Malik, speaking at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, made this ominous assessment: “Believe me, my friends, the mind today is in profound trouble, perhaps more than ever before. How to order the mind on sound Christian principles, at the heart of where it is formed and informed, is one of the ... greatest themes that can be considered.”<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Christian Mind*, Henry Blamires has made a similar point, stating that Christians might worship and pray as Christians, but they do not *think* as Christians. He goes on to say, “The Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in Christian History.”<sup>2</sup> With the exception of several stunning examples, Christians today have lost their minds.

As a result, it is hard for many Christians today to conceive of the experience explained by Francis Collins, a professing Christian and the leader of the international human genome project. In his book *The Language of God*, Collins described the experience of successfully sequencing the human genome as “both a stunning scientific achievement and an occasion of worship.”<sup>3</sup> Collins goes on to make the case that belief in God is rational and that the principles of faith are complementary with the principles of science. This shouldn’t surprise us when we consider the Bible’s teaching on the connection of the mind to the heart, and of the foundational reality of God’s existence. However, many of us have unknowingly accepted the secular notion put forward by men like the late biologist Stephen Jay Gould, who claimed that the spiritual and the rational worlds should occupy separate, “non-overlapping magisteria.” In other words, the heart should embrace the spiritual in private and the mind should only be used to explore the scientific in public. So when it

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980). P. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978), pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 3.

comes to faith and spirituality, disengage your mind and keep your beliefs to yourself. The foundational beliefs of the Bible do not always shape how we think about God, ourselves, or the world around us.

The tireless Enemy of our souls is pleasantly aware of the problem. After all, he helped to create it. He knows that if he can capture our minds, he can steer our hearts. If he can keep the truth of salvation from our minds, he can weaken our ability to resist him.

My brother-in-law is a Navy Seal. I am always fascinated by their top secret training; so I drill him constantly with questions, hoping to learn something that I could be killed for knowing. I was surprised to learn that much of their hand-to-hand combat training is based on the principle that "the mind controls the body." A Seal will try to surprise and shock the opponent so that their mind is not able to effectively control their body. Satan and his forces use a similar tactic. They know that a blow to the head is lethal, so they set out to wage a battle for the mind. If we lose our minds, we lose the battle.

But we do not need to fear. Ephesians 6:10-20 makes it clear that God has provided the armor of God to defend us in the spiritual struggle raging around us. More specifically, Ephesians 6:17 tells us to "*take the helmet of salvation*" as protection for our heads. It goes without saying that a helmet is an essential part of a soldier's armor. Wearing this helmet is crucial if we are to "*stand against the schemes of the devil.*" The important question we need to answer today then is:

### **How does Christ defend my mind from the attack of Satan?**

Before we go on to answer that question, however, we should say a few words about the helmet of salvation. First, like the rest of the armor, *the helmet is provided for us by God*. It is a gift. In fact, God himself wore it before he gave it us. Speaking of Christ, the Son of God, Isaiah 59:16-17 reads, "*Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.*" Here Christ is portrayed as a conquering warrior, zealously doing battle to accomplish our salvation. The verb for "take" in Ephesians 6:17 can be translated "*receive* the helmet of salvation." Like a victorious king, Christ equips

his army by handing out the best armor in existence. He gives us the helmet of salvation to protect us against lethal strikes to our mind.

Second, the helmet is called “the helmet of *salvation*.” Christ primarily protects our minds with the truth of salvation. The biblical term for “salvation” in the Old and the New Testament literally means “to deliver, rescue, or liberate.” In some uses it also has the connotations of “healing” or “restoration.” Salvation then is God’s cosmic rescue mission in which Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again to completely and freely liberate us from the consequences of our sin. That is salvation in its most comprehensive, big-picture sense. It has many glorious components, but that is the sum of it. As he died on the cross, Jesus cried out triumphantly, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). His saving work rescued us from the bondage of sin, the wrath of God, and the grip of Satan. Nothing was left undone.

*The helmet of salvation tells the authoritative story of my life—past, present, and future. It answers the question: Who am I in Christ? It tells me what is true about me now that I am a Christian. The Bible uses three tenses of the verb “to save” in order to paint the total picture of salvation. It says that “I have been saved” (past tense), that “I am being saved” (present tense), and that “I will be saved” (future tense). Christ is the only Savior of my past, my present, and my future. From beginning to end, salvation is his work.*

Therefore, I must place the truth of salvation on my mind. Only it can defend my mind against the falsehood, deception, and temptation of the Evil One. No weapon he has can crack it! As God promised through Isaiah, “*No weapon fashioned against you shall succeed*” (54:17). So how does the helmet of salvation guard my mind? Let’s look at that now.

**First, Christ defends my mind with the assurance that *I have been saved*.** If I am a Christian today, then the helmet of salvation guards my mind with the truth that at some time in my past I was saved. (Now whether this has ever occurred for you is a great question and worth answering; but here I am speaking of a believing Christian). The helmet of salvation tells me that there was a moment in time where I went from death to life, from being an enemy of God to being his friend, from being an orphan to being his child. At a specific moment in time a definitive action took place in which I became a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). I went from being “out of

Christ" to being "in Christ." A spiritual birth took place which began my life with God. There was a moment in real time and space, whether I can put a time and date to it, in which I went from being a non-Christian to being a Christian.

All of this saving activity in my past centers around and leads up to a definitive and pivotal moment the Bible calls *justification*. For example, Romans 5:1 says, "*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith [past tense], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The word justification means that we are declared to be righteous, that we are accepted as if we are in a right relationship with God and his Law. We are put right with God. He accepts us only because of Christ's perfect righteousness and his death for our sins. A great exchange happens in which our sin got credited to Jesus and his righteousness gets credited to us through faith (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we are justified, our sins are forgiven and we are accepted by God on the basis of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. The effects of what Jesus accomplished in his lifetime now become active in my life!

I have been redeemed from *the penalty* of sin. Jesus rescued me from the wrath of God and the just penalty that my sin deserved. The guilt of my sin is no longer held against me. The debt has been fully paid. I am not perfect. In fact, I am not any better than before; but now I am accepted by God. I am under his blessing instead of his condemnation. I have a personal relationship with him instead of being separated from him. I have the gift of eternal life instead of damnation. The penalty of sin is removed. However, as we will see later, the presence of sin is not.

One more effect of this is that I have a new allegiance. I am no longer under the power of the devil. I now belong to the family of God and the army of heaven. Colossians 1:13-14 puts it this way: "*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" At a point in my past, God rescued me from Satan's clutches and forever enlisted me in his ranks. Now I live and die under his banner. I wear his armor. I fight for his cause with love and truth. I am defended by his power. As David declared, "*You bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as a shield*" (Psalm 5:12).

Now when the truth that I have been saved covers my mind, I am defended from several attacks of the Enemy. I am reminded that I no longer owe obedience to Satan. I am protected from accusing thoughts that would rob me of peace or hinder me from serving God boldly. I know that I am safe in God's love. I also do not fear any punishment from God and stand with confidence in his presence. I know that when I pray he hears me and answers me. Furthermore, I am freed from guilt and regret over my past sin. Someone has said that regret is the past crippling you in the present. The truth that I have been saved, that I have been justified, frees me from the darkness of my past and the dominion of evil forces. I also should become very humble and full of love. Who am I that I should be called a child of God? As the Bible says, "*We love because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).

Now that we have looked at our past, let's turn to the present. **Christ defends my mind with the encouragement that *I am being saved*.** Although my past is marked by a definitive moment, my present is characterized by an ongoing process. In this process I am living in the tension between who I was and who I will be. There are two principles at work in me at the same time. One is *life* and the other is *death*. The result of this process, however, is that I am becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. The Bible calls this process *sanctification*, which simply means "growth in holiness." It means that I daily become more of who God wants me to be. All of my life is being slowly (and sometimes even painfully) transformed after the pattern of Jesus. In the past I was united to Jesus and my spiritual life began. Now—in the present—God's salvation is powerfully at work within me to make me more like Jesus. Romans 8:29 explains the design God has for my present life in Christ: "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*" He chose to save me so I could ultimately be like Him. He has a lot of work to do to get there.

Presently, God's Spirit is at work in me to save me from *the power* of sin. At the point of justification, all of my sin did not disappear. Remember, it was the *penalty* of sin that was removed. Our sinful nature still remains as the ruins of a former life. The Bible calls it the "old man," the "earthly" part of us, and "the flesh." To

grow spiritually we are told to *“put off the old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires... and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”* (Ephesians 4:22-24). Salvation in my present life involves putting off an old way of living and thinking and putting on a new way of living and thinking. Elsewhere we are told to *“put to death therefore what is earthly in you”* (Colossians 3:5). Our growth in Christ-likeness involves this ongoing process of death and life. The old man and his ways are put to death and the new man and his ways are brought to life by the power of God’s Spirit.

One of the best definitions of what the Bible teaches on this process of sanctification is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 35: *“Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”* What an encouraging thing it is to know that God is working in me today to cause me to die to sin and live to righteousness. Although I might take one step backward, I will take two steps forward. I am being made new and free by his grace every day.

Hayley and I lived in New England for a few years while I was in Seminary. The fall was the most beautiful time of year in New England. All the leaves of the various hardwoods would turn into warm hues of orange, red, and yellow in the cool, crisp autumn air before finally falling to the ground. I noticed, though, that all the trees would shed their leaves except the oak trees. Their leaves would simply turn brown and hang there until either the winter winds would rip them off or the new leaves would bud in the spring. The new leaves would have to literally push the old ones off.

Our growth as Christians is like an oak tree and its leaves. The old nature and way of life hangs dead on us until new life springs up and pushes the dead stuff off. Or sometimes God might use the cold, stormy winds of hardship and persecution to pull them off. But his goal is always the same: to bring new life into us and to make us after the image of Jesus. In other words, we are being saved from sin, from its effects and its power. Our relationship with God is already secure because we have been saved; but now he continues his good work in us through the process of sanctification.

One of the most important parts of this process involves my mind. Romans 12:2 says: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by the testing of your mind you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Notice in this verse the connection between the mind and spiritual growth. To be *conformed* to God’s will, I must be *transformed* by the renewing of my mind. A mind renewed by salvation (or “the mercies of God” as they are called in Romans 12:1) has discernment. Discernment leads to knowing and doing God’s will. This is why we need the helmet of salvation. So much of the battle happens in the mind. Now this is not what pop-psychology calls the “power of positive thinking.” This is a true, spiritual dynamic based on the salvation which Jesus Christ accomplished for us and which the Holy Spirit is applying to us. This is true, spiritual power that comes from the gospel.

All of this means that I will struggle with sin in this life. I will never reach perfection in this lifetime; neither will you. It’s cruel how we enter relationships expecting perfect righteousness from each other. We do the same with churches. We need to throw our utopian ideals out the window. We shouldn’t get so easily jaded and disillusioned. Why are our frameworks of life so fragile that as soon as someone fails us or hurts us we throw up our hands and say “whatever!” Some of you have been hurt by someone or by a church. Some of you have been seriously hurt. Now you are disillusioned, gun-shy, and hesitant to ever risk being vulnerable and committed again. Remember that nobody is perfect, even Christians. More than that, we still have sin deeply embedded in our DNA. Although we can still hold each other to certain standards of acceptable behavior, we can’t expect perfection from anyone. Forgiveness is the only oil that keeps the gears of life moving. Maybe you’ve seen the bumper sticker or refrigerator magnet with the saying, *“Be patient with me, God’s not finished with me yet.”* It’s true. He’s not. So don’t let Satan discourage you when you sin or fail. Get back in the fight. And don’t write off other Christians when they fail or sin. Be patient with them.

Because we are being saved, we can and must fight for spiritual growth. The Christian life is not like a tubing trip down a mountain river. We don’t just hop in, go with the flow, and enjoy beautiful sights and sounds along the way. The Christian life is a

battle, at times a fierce uphill, upstream battle. We have three spiritual enemies: the world, our sinful nature, and the devil. To win the battle against ourselves we must die to live. We have to die to ourselves and our sinful desires. We can face these struggles knowing that it is possible for us to conquer sin by the grace of God. As Romans 6:14 says, *"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."* We also have to die to the world and the way we used to live and to the way it wants us to live now. And we can. Jesus himself said, *"In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). It is also possible for us to overcome the Enemy. James 4:7-8 promises, *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."* The Christian life might be a war, but we are on the winning side.

We are in the process of being saved from the power of sin. We are being made new. We are being healed, restored, and transformed. We are made strong in his strength. So serve God today! Glorify him with every part of your being now. Die to everything that doesn't glorify him, and pray that God will bring to life everything that will. Like Phillips Brooks once said, *"Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks."* With the helmet of salvation we can fight without fear, protected by the love and power of God.

We move on now from the past and the present to the future of salvation. **Christ defends my mind with the hope that I will be saved.** My future in Christ is secure and glorious. Although my salvation has no end, it does have a future and it has a climax. God will complete what he began in me (Philippians 1:6). The culmination of our salvation will be reached in heaven in what the Bible calls *glorification*. Glorification will occur when we are elevated up to God's presence and away from the fallen world. It will happen either at our death or at Christ's return, whichever happens first. Romans 8:30 gives a brief outline of this order of salvation when it says, *"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* The interesting thing about this verse is that the Apostle Paul speaks of something future as if it was in the past. Our future glorification is so certain that Paul saw it as something already completed. Our future in

heaven enjoying the presence of God is going to be great, awesome, and wonderful. It is also secure. This is what the Bible means when it says that I “will be saved” (See Mark 13:13; Matt. 10:22).

When we are glorified, we will not only be free from the *penalty* and *power* of sin; we will be free from its very *presence*. Furthermore, all of its effects on us and the universe will be removed. We will live in a heaven and earth that is saturated and radiating with nothing but the glory and goodness of God. Revelation gives us just a glimpse of what our glorification will involve:

*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning or crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away* (Revelation 21:3-4).

We cannot begin to imagine what is waiting for us in heaven. However, we know that it will be glorious. The process of struggling with sin will be over. Satan will be defeated. We will be like Christ and with Christ forever.

When we view the future of our salvation, it gives us hope. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and instructed them to wear “*the hope of salvation*” as a helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:8). The reason he did this is that when we consider the future that Christ has secured for us, it gives hope.

In heaven the spiritual battle will be over. We will not wear or need armor in heaven. The helmet of salvation will be traded for the crown of glory.<sup>4</sup> As the Apostle Paul joyfully proclaimed, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness...*” (2 Timothy 4:8). In heaven, the Church *militant* will become the Church *triumphant*. We fight and struggle now, but then we will celebrate. William Gurnall, in his spiritual classic, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, writes: “*In heaven we shall appear not in armour but in robes of glory; but here they are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work, and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ.*” The hope of our future glory should motivate and energize us to live confidently every day, fighting on in the good fight, knowing that victory is sure.

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<sup>4</sup> See 1 Peter 5:4; see also James 1:12; Revelation 2:10

The future should help us now. That is how hope works. Romans 8:24-25 says, “*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we have hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*” Hope makes us more patient and joyful in our walk with Christ. It makes us more diligent and faithful. We work as we wait for that glorious day when we will be saved.

The hope of salvation also gives us peace. Just as regret over the past can cripple us in the present, so also fear of the future can cripple us in the present. Satan can lead us to the “paralysis of analysis” by making us consider all the things that can go wrong in this life. Or he might even tempt us to doubt the reality of things that wait us in heaven. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis captures this dynamic well. The arch-demon, Screwtape, writes to his young apprentice Wormwood on how to tempt his “patient:”

*“We want him to be in the maximum uncertainty, so that his mind will be filled with contradictory pictures of the future, every one of which arouses hope or fear. There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human’s mind against [God]. He wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them.”<sup>5</sup>*

If Satan can keep us busy worrying about what will happen to us in the future, he has won already. We know the future. No matter what may happen to us in this life, Christ has won a future for us that is both secure and glorious. It is being kept for us, and we are being kept for it (1 Peter 1:4-5). Christ protects our minds with the knowledge that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

This is the truth for every believer. This is who you are because of God’s grace. From beginning to end your spiritual journey from justification through sanctification and to glorification is God’s doing. Nothing Satan can do can un-write or edit the story he has authored for your life. If you stand against Satan and his evil forces with the helmet of salvation, you can stand firm in the evil day. Keep your eyes on Christ, keep his Word in your heart, and keep his salvation on your mind. Doing so will enable you to live for Him both now and forever.

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<sup>5</sup> –C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 25.

Can this be said of your life? Can you say that you have been saved, that you are being saved, and that you will be saved through Jesus Christ? You can't skip any steps. You'll never be good enough to save yourself. You will never make yourself holy enough to be accepted by him. Neither can you start with his grace and then continue with your own efforts. Justification is first, then sanctification, then glorification. You can't do any of them on your own. Only Christ can give you *the helmet of salvation*. And without him you are defenseless. Come to him today.