



Be Prepared



The Desire for Protection

Protection is a basic human desire. Humans seek safety above all else—we can benefit from neither food nor clothing if our survival is continually threatened. The study of primitive cultures around the world reveals that the first task of human society is to provide security—protection against the elements of nature. Researchers around the globe have found that a society at war cannot be brought to peace by police action and diplomatic sanctions alone—it must also provide basic security for its citizens. Much closer to home, the nesting instinct is one of the strongest human instincts—just ask young parents-to-be. The desire to protect ourselves and what we value most comes from our desire for security, strength, and self-sufficiency.

However, such security can be compared to an infant's pacifier. The pacifier prompts the baby's suckling reflex even though it doesn't give the nourishing milk. The pacifier provides the semblance of what the baby needs, and prompts the appropriate reaction, but the need is not actually met. It is like building a fence for a flock of lambs without noticing the wolf hiding inside the barrier—the threat still remains. The establishment of laws in a nation also depends upon law-abiding citizens—the threat of legal consequences does not always deter the determined criminal. Our pursuit of security does not always provide true protection.

When it comes to spiritual protection, many people believe that Christians are securely positioned in Christ so that nothing will harm them. There is a faith in one's proximity to the Savior as if there is a force field shielding one from the darkness that abounds in the hearts of many in this world. In a way there can never be a fence or wall high enough to guard against every evil scheme.

Believers may, however, find shelter from the swirling tempests of this world. In the laws of the Old Testament, the Israelites were commanded to build



shelter in recognition of God's provision of safety during their flee from Egypt, an act celebrated in the Feast of Sukkoth (Leviticus 23; Nehemiah 8). Everlasting shelter, however, comes only through dwelling with God himself, as evidenced in Psalms: "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1; see also 27:5; 55:8; 61:4). God promises this shelter to those who are willing to live faithfully for Him (Psalm 91:14-16).

Reflect on this...

Do you agree or disagree with the author that protection is a basic human desire? Why?

What are some differences between security and the biblical idea of shelter?

According to the psalmist, what are some ways God provides shelter?

The Temptation of Self-Sufficiency

The desire for protection also encourages people to rely on their own strength. The history of Western civilization is filled with examples of modern heroes that apparently needed no outside assistance to succeed. In the 20th century, the heroic stories of self-made scientists like Albert Einstein, daring explorers like the Apollo astronauts, and savvy tech entrepreneurs like Bill Gates continue to create the idyllic notion that people may become what they want to be by their own volition. But as it goes so often with heroic tales, there is more to the story.

Much has been written about these modern heroes, and in every story there is a common theme—each of them needed someone else along their road to success. Bill Gates had Paul Allen, Einstein had the Olympia Academy, and the Apollo astronauts were part of a team of like-minded colleagues that challenged and cajoled each other toward success. These individuals were part of larger movements, though that does not detract from their personal roles in their respective successes. These modern heroes have been individually successful, but they were never alone in reaching their success. The modern American myth of rugged individualism is not completely accurate. It did not take long for the spiritual vacuum of personal success to create a hunger for spiritual fulfillment. The Great Awakening and Holiness Movement in the United States revealed the deep spiritual need for something—Someone—more than the unholy modern trinity of “me, myself, and I.” The movement away from self-sufficiency led to an acknowledgement that human existence is, at its very roots, reliant on God.

Reflect on this...

What are other historical or contemporary examples of the self-sufficient hero?

Why do you think our society elevates this kind of hero in popular culture?

Be Prepared for the Struggle

The counterpoint to the very basic human desire for protection is God's call for believers to be prepared. In the sixth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul challenges the Christians living in one of the largest and most diverse cities in Greece to not be discouraged by hostile opposition, but rather to take an aggressively peaceful response of preparation. The apostle encourages the young church to be "fitted with the readiness [*hetoimasia*] that comes with the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15b). In other words, he tells them that in spite of the intense self-preservation instinct, the desire to turn and run away, they must be prepared to enter a dark world and stand with conviction for Jesus Christ.

Spiritual maturity is better understood as spiritual readiness: *Am I ready to enter the fray where my faith will be challenged and give my life completely into God's hands?* This is the kind of struggle that the apostle Paul lived out. Earlier in a letter to another church, the apostle reluctantly wrote to his detractors, "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. . . . Besides everything

else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23b-28). There was not a neutral zone for Christian believers then or now. Even Greek philosophers like Seneca recognized that life is a battle. And as Christians, we are called into the struggle.

Be prepared to enter a dark world and stand with conviction for Jesus Christ.

The apostle defines the struggle as “not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). The victory will not be easily won. The calling itself, however, is not to win, but to enter the conflict.

The apostle points out the real needs of those entering into the struggle:

- What we need is found *near* Christ. Christians do not seek security, but seek to “stand firm” with Him in the midst of life’s struggles (Ephesians 6:13).
- What we need is found *with* Christ. Christians do not endure by their own strength, but “in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10, KJV).
- What we need is found *in only* Christ. Christians do not need protective charms and weapons, but instead, the defensive preparation of living in the Spirit as the “full armor of God,” and the offensive tools of the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” and “[prayer] in the Spirit on all occasions” (Ephesians 6:13, 17-18).

The messages of the following chapters will help flesh out the significance of the spiritual readiness to which all Christians are called:

The Real Enemy (Chapter 2): Our enemy is found in the spiritual powers and pervading darkness, not in “flesh and blood.”

The Utility Belt of Truth (Chapter 3): The truth of the good news offers a heroic faith that is more powerful than any human can imagine.

The “Lorica” of Right Living (Chapter 4): The commitment to right living not only protects believers, but enables us to right the world’s wrongs.

Walking on the Road to Peace (Chapter 5): The fitness of the disciple is found in his or her ability to carry the good news into hostile territory.

Delivered by the Helmet and Sword (Chapter 6): Salvation and the gospel are gifts of deliverance for both insiders and outsiders.

Prayer on Active Duty (Chapter 7): The missional life requires a willingness to enter into a life of active prayer for ourselves and others.

God’s willingness to enter life’s battle with us will be the focus in the following pages. The goal of this study will be joining Paul in “fearlessly [making] known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:20). ●

Reflect on this...

What are the primary motives behind the desire for protection?

What is the significance of our battle being “not against flesh and blood”?

Where is spiritual conflict taking place? How do Christian believers know they are ready for the battle?

NOTES

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