

And take the helmet of salvation ...

(Ephesians 6:17)

Introduction

When I was young, I loved playing American football. When I first began to play, though I was small, so was almost everyone else on both teams. Nevertheless, we wore a full uniform, including a helmet. Having a helmet provided us with confidence to engage one another on the field of play and to tackle as hard as we could.

I last played football in my first year of high school. At that point, there were no height or weight limits, and so the helmet became even more important. Without it, I would most likely be brain dead. As I collided with players much larger than me, sometimes at high velocity, the helmet gave me a sense of security for impact. So it is with the helmet of salvation.

The “helmet of salvation” provides the Christian with confidence to engage in the battle regardless of what we face. We go forth with the assurance that God is for us, that our greatest enemy has been defeated, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and that our salvation is both final and eternally secure. It provides us with the kind of hard-headedness that gives us courage in the face of conflict. As Hughes comments, “A helmet is a confidence-builder.... The helmet enabled a man to stand where otherwise he would have been long gone.”

May God help us to wear this helmet with confidence and commitment for the confrontation to the glory of God.

What It Is

The Roman helmet was made of thick leather, which was then matted with pieces of brass or even iron, which covered the head and the cheeks. An officer’s helmet had a plume, which identified the soldier as belonging to the Roman army. It was rather heavy because it was thick enough to protect the soldier from the bludgeoning strike of a battle axe.

There were at least three factors that this helmet pointed to when a soldier received it from the hands of the quartermaster.

First, it served the purpose of identification and inspiration. The plume was not merely cosmetic. It was more than a ceremonial adornment. Rather, it was essential because, in the thick of battle, it *identified* which side the soldier was on. And this could be a matter of life

and death. But perhaps its greatest purpose was to rally the troops. Centurions and other high ranking soldiers were identified by these and this would encourage the troops in battle.

Second, it served the purpose of indoctrination. To be a Roman soldier meant that you were committed to the welfare of the Empire and that you had been well instructed about its value. Further, when it came to defending the Empire, the soldier had to have been well trained. The Roman army could not afford to send into battle those who were not well-instructed, well-trained, and well-equipped. They would need to be well-*indoctrinated*.

Third, it served the purpose of implementation. That is, wearing the helmet indicated that the soldier was prepared for battle, ready for confrontation with the enemy. It indicated that the soldier was prepared to *do* something. It indicated that, after initial preparation, the soldier was ready for *participation* in the fight. That is, the helmeted soldier was confident and committed for confrontation.

So, what does this mean for the Christian? What is Paul's point?

Fundamentally, Paul is speaking about the Christian protecting her mind, guarding her spiritual wits about her. "Keeping her head" may be a good way of putting it.

Paul uses an appositive, which is to say, "the helmet, which is salvation." But precisely what is the helmet of salvation – or, the helmet, which is salvation? It will be helpful to compare Scripture with Scripture here. The first place we should turn is to Isaiah 59:16–17:

He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his own arm brought salvation for him; and his own righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

As with the other pieces of armour, the helmet of salvation is that which is supplied by God. It is his armour, his salvation, which he provides for us. It is the helmet that God wore in victory as he saved his people and judged his enemies. Fundamentally, it signifies what he has done and what he can do for his people. Hodge says, "Salvation is itself the helmet. That which adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence and joy, is the fact that he is saved." And it is with this *confident* mindset that we *commit* to the confrontation.

You see, because God, by his grace, has secured our victory, our salvation is secure. It is precisely because God has done it all that we are encouraged to do something, not to add to our salvation, but rather *from* our salvation and *as the result of* our salvation. As Austen notes, "Each piece of armour relates both to that which is revealed in the gospel and also that which becomes ours in the Lord Jesus Christ; the objective reality of that which we are given and the subjective experience of the Christian as we receive it and are obedient to it."

In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Batman is defeated by Bane, and Bane leads an army of thugs to take over Gotham. The police force is soundly defeated, and quickly succumbs to Bane and his forces. For a while, no resistance is offered. But when Batman returns, and shines his Bat Signal in the sky, Gotham's police officers receive the courage to don their uniforms and help him fight. The Signal did not give them the authority to confront evil, but it encouraged them to grasp the authority that they already had and take the battle to the enemy. Batman restored and fuelled their commitment for confrontation.

It must be stressed that while Christians have, in a sense, been passively clothed with God's salvation, nevertheless at the same time we must actively accept it. We must actively receive it. Yes, we must do something because God has done something!

But this God-issued helmet appears elsewhere in the New Testament, too. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul writes, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith, and love; and as a helmet the hope of salvation." The "hope of salvation" clearly speaks to more than our present condition, though of course it includes this. Paul is speaking of salvation comprehensively – our final salvation.

It is obvious that he is not speaking merely of what has occurred in our past by the gospel (justification). He is not simply saying, "Remember that you have *been* saved." Rather, though it includes justification, he is emphasising that we are to remember (to keep our head) that we are continually being saved and that we will one day by finally and fully saved! This is what we "hope" for. This is what we anticipate with certainty.

This is what provides confidence and propels commitment for the Christian's confrontation. We keep our head in the battle by keeping in our mind what awaits us when we die, what awaits us when Jesus comes again. And what is that? Salvation – deliverance once for all – from the power of sin, from the pleasures of sin, from the presence of sin. But, this deliverance is not only a negative anticipation, it is also a positive anticipation: deliverance, once and for all, to a glorious body, to a glorious creation, to a glorious and immortal existence.

In summary, Paul is exhorting us to protect our minds, to protect our thinking, to protect how we interpret the world, to protect our biblical worldview by maintaining an eternal perspective – to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

We can conclude, then, that the helmet of salvation speaks of the salvation which God has wrought for his people and which he has so graciously brought to his people. We can face our enemy with the sense of full security in what God has done for us. "It is because he is a fellow citizen of the saints, a child of God, a partaker of the salvation of the gospel, that he can face even the most potent enemies with confidence, knowing that he shall be brought off more than conqueror through him that loved him." (Hodge)

Why We Need It

Peter urges us to “gird up the loins of [our] mind” and to “rest [our] hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). He later adds,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(1 Peter 5:8–11)

We need the “helmet of salvation” because we all too often lose the plot. For example, we are prone to embrace a subtle form of the prosperity gospel, which erroneously supposes that everything will always work out as we want it and when we want it. For most of us, this means that things will work out *this* side of the grave.

But as we don the helmet of salvation, we fight the good fight of faith with one goal: the glory of God, without demanding what we defined as good for ourselves.

We need to grasp both what God’s salvation *is*, and what it is *not*. This is part and parcel of what it means to receive the helmet of salvation. It is true that God’s redemption of his people is both accomplished and applied. But the fullness of this redemption awaits (Ephesians 1:12–14; 4:30; Rom 8:18–25; 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:8).

As we wear the helmet of salvation, we face life with hopeful joy, to and for the glory of God, knowing that, ultimately, as well as immediately, this is for our own good. With such a mindset, we confidently and committedly confront disease, temptation, discouragement, doubt, failure, broken relationships, etc. We face challenges in the church and temptation to compromise most effectively when we have an eternal perspective.

Another reason we need the helmet of salvation is because our assurance is often attacked. When this occurs, we are in danger of losing our confidence and commitment. We therefore need to keep our head by the gospel. We are no longer under condemnation!

Simon Austen helpfully writes,

The fact that there needs to be a conscious donning of this helmet means that Satan will attack our assurance of salvation or our belief in the efficacy of the cross. The helmet reminds us that Jesus has done all that is necessary; we are eternally secure. He has done everything for us to be right with God, raised with Christ and made a part of the new humanity of God’s people. Through God’s grace and mercy that helmet has been made ours.

Don't let the devil play with your mind. God has provided all we need for sanctification. He has provided all we need for our preservation (Jude 24–25). He has promised and provided our final glorification (1 Peter 1:13).

How It Helps Us

Paul uses a Greek word here (“take”) that literally means to accept or to receive. God has secured our salvation—it is *his* salvation—and as the one who issues the armour, he expects us to receive it. as Hughes notes, “In Isaiah, God’s helmet of salvation is what he *does*; in Ephesians, it is what he *gives*.”

There are several legitimate practical applications concerning our daily taking up this offered helmet of salvation.

Identification and Inspiration

As noted, the helmet was designed to properly identify which side the soldier was on. This could be a matter of life and death. This is always the case in war. One of the most damaging strategies in war is when the enemy infiltrates your forces by wearing your side’s armour. It is vital to identify who is on your side. The same is true spiritually.

The helmet, which is salvation, helps us to embrace our identity in Christ. The identifying mark of the Christian is the gospel. The Christian is set apart from the world through God’s saving work in the gospel of his Son. We are set apart unto God in Christ. This establishes our identity.

Remember who you are as you face the world, flesh and the devil. This provides confidence and commitment.

Note also that the helmet, which is salvation, is not an isolated identity. Rather, when God saves us, he joins us to his family. We call this the church. We can make both the observation and the application that those who properly “take up” the helmet of salvation will also take up church membership. Meaningful, biblical church membership identifies us as those on the right side of the fight. Meaningful, biblical church membership is not merely an outward adornment, but rather, like the plume, biblically meaningful church membership declares, “I’m in the Lord’s army.”

We must all wear the same helmet. If you refuse this, you may be aligning yourself with the enemy more than you either intend or realise.

Christian, where is your plume? You cannot separate God’s gospel from God’s gospel people. Put another way, God does not give birth to orphans. To be a Christian is to be a committed member of the church. You need to identify with God and with his people. You

cannot separate the two. You need to face your confrontation with others who also display the plume of church membership. The helmet without the plume puts you in a vulnerable place. In fact, isolation from the church body is so dangerous that Paul equates it to being handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5).

The plume also served as an inspiration to the troops. Usually bright red, it would be visible to troops in the midst of the battle. It gave them heart to fight on as they saw their leader fighting with them. Oh, how we need to see our Leader—the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10)! The helmet, which is salvation, keeps us focused on Christ. And this inspires us and encourages to stay in the fight rather than fleeing. Look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith (see Hebrews 12:1-2).

Finally, take care of your plume. Keep it in good condition. Be a leader of others. Others need you to do this. Others need the encouragement that they are not fighting alone. They need to know that you are on their side—and vice versa. Wear this helmet faithfully and encourage others in the fight. Meet with your fellow saints. Read with them. Pray with them. Exhort and encourage one another.

Indoctrination

As noted, the Roman soldier needed to be instructed to be prepared for battle. He would need instruction concerning what was at stake and how to protect what was at stake. So does the Christian.

We need to be instructed, to be indoctrinated or catechised, concerning the gospel of God. We must give serious thought and attention to the salvation that God has wrought for us. Without this, we will not wear our helmet well.

Our confidence and commitment requires *content*. You will fail in the confrontation without being grounded in the good news of God's Word. Students need to be grounded in the gospel to face the peer pressure that will certainly come their way. Singles need to be grounded in the gospel if they will face their unique temptations. Spouses will only overcome their temptations as they are grounded in the gospel. Our heads must be filled with truth. Read, study and gather in order to be filled.

Implementation

There is a time for instruction and preparation, but this is because there is coming a time for confrontation. This is an underlying and significant theme of this passage from 6:10-20. We are to implement what we know in our confrontation with the devil and his devils. We are to put on our helmets and apply the effort needed to participate victoriously in this battle.

Clearly, the helmet of salvation is for this very purpose. Clearly, it speaks to the necessity of implementation of what we know to be true about God's salvation.

As we have seen, the Christian faces a very real, personal, present, powerful, perverse and powerful enemy. The devil and his devils seek to derail us from our purpose, which is to display the wisdom of God as revealed in his gospel (3:10). In fact, contextually, it can be argued that Paul's deep concern is for the unity of the church. Paul has argued all along that God's purpose is for his people to be made up of one new man without superficial distinction, while at the same time recognising valuable diversity. The helmet of salvation is one means to reaching this goal.

But such a task makes us special targets of the evil one. *What shall we do?*

We should review what God has done for us. He has provided us with the truth as it is in Jesus; he has given to us righteousness by which we know we are accepted; and he has provided us with peace arising from his gospel. We are well-prepared to face the challenges in our homes, in the workplace, in the wider world, and right in the local church. Victory is our promised birthright (1 John 5:1-4; John 16:33).

But this victory will not come to us passively. Though we might be well-prepared for victory, yet we need to *do* something. We need to move from what we might call *passive preparation* to *active participation*. We are to receive the helmet of salvation with the expectation to do something. We are to apply effort in this warfare.

John MacArthur observes, "The truly surrendered life is the life committed to aggressive, confrontive, and unreserved obedience to all of God's commands.... The faithful believer must always be submissive to the Lord, but submission to Him is the furthest thing from passivity." We must respond. We must *do* something if we will experience the promised victory.

Some argue about the order here. Surely it makes more sense to put on one's helmet before grabbing your shield? Perhaps, in some cases. But when the arrows are coming at you fast and furious, ducking behind a door like shield is not a bad decision! Then you reach for your helmet. But why would you need a helmet? Because there is coming a time when you will lower your shield and will head into hand to hand combat. And when you do, you will want your head to be protected. Think of it this way: Faith put us into the conflict because faith saves us, thus putting us on the opposite side of the enemy. But this salvation – rightly appreciated and contemplated – fuels our faith for the conflict. Saving faith provides us confidence and with commitment for the confrontation.

Again, the word translated “take” is, literally, to receive or accept. Paul is exhorting us to actively receive what God has already provided in the gospel. He is exhorting us to do something with what we have!

This letter is full of imperatives. In 2:11, Paul exhorts us to remember what and where we were. In 3:13, he challenges us to not lose heart. In 4:1–2, he instructs us to walk worthy of the vocation to which we have been called. He exhorts hard work in 4:3–16 to keep Christ-centred unity in the church. He tells us to talk like Christians (4:17–21). He instructs us in 4:22–32 to put off sinful patterns and to put on righteous, godly patterns of doing and thinking. He tells us to imitate God, not the world (5:1–16), to walk wisely (5:15–17), to be filled with the Spirit and submit to Christ in every sphere of life (5:18–6:9), and, finally, to stand and fight (6:10–20).

As we face the enemy, we need to take up the gospel and apply it. We are to do something with the gospel. We must do the hard thing of learning the gospel and its rich depth and rich applications. We must do the hard thing of reading, thinking, and conversing with one another. We must do the hard thing of prioritising the Lord’s Day – all the opportunities to gather. We must do the hard thing of saying no to those things that will mess with our minds. We must do the hard thing of saying no to family and to friends. We must do the hard thing of uncomfortably exposing our lives to others so that we might receive the help we need. We must do the hard thing of changing our minds about certain doctrines and certain lifestyle choices. We must do the hard thing of saying no to self. We must do the hard thing of being criticised for our commitment to Christ and his gospel. We must do the hard thing of helping our church to do something! We must do the hard thing of becoming hard-headed (because soft-hearted)!

The devil seeks to discourage us. He tempts us to apathy through our failures and our frustrations. This is why we must do something. If we do not, then we will be overcome rather than overcoming. We need this in our evangelistic and in our discipleship efforts. We need this in our ecclesiological and in our missiological efforts. We need this in our sanctification efforts. We need this in our efforts towards godliness in our homes.

Non-Christian friend, the helmet of salvation is offered to you. Will you receive it? Will you bow the knee to King Jesus and accept what he has done for all who will turn from sin trusting in his death, burial and resurrection? Receive this helmet. Receive it today. Receive it now.

Dear Christian, take up the helmet of salvation and you will find all the confidence you need for the commitment which God requires. May God grant us grace to take up personal responsibility to do something with what God has provided. As we are relationally and reverently indoctrinated, this will increasingly be our experience (3:14–21).

Confident and Committed Confrontation

Ephesians 6:17a

Doug Van Meter

AMEN