

Ephesians 6:17a

Introduction

We should know by now that as Christians, we're engaged in a life and death battle – an intense struggle, Paul calls it, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. What's at stake in the battle is not our physical bodies or this earthly life, but our souls and our eternal future. Satan's strategies and weapons are powerful and deadly, and designed with craft and cunning. And yet for all this, we have the panoply of God. God has graciously and freely provided us not only with the ground we stand on, which has already been won by Christ's victory on the cross, but also with a complete set of armor that will enable us to stand strong, and fight, and be victorious in the end.

Paul uses the imagery of a Roman soldier's armor, and so the first three pieces of armor are the pieces of armor the Roman soldier would actually put on first. The first three pieces of armor are ones that the soldier straps on and wears.

- ✓ “Stand, therefore, having *girded your waist* with TRUTH,
- ✓ and having *put on the breastplate* of RIGHTEOUSNESS,
- ✓ and having *shod your feet* with the PREPAREDNESS that comes from THE GOSPEL OF PEACE...”

Once these things were all strapped on and in place, it was time for the soldier to take up his shield. So Paul says:

- ✓ “In all things, having *taken up the shield* of FAITH with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

With only one hand now left free, there was still the soldier's helmet and sword. It was only natural to leave the helmet until last, and yet it did have to go on before you took the sword, or you'd have no hands to put it on with. And so Paul concludes:

- ✓ “And *take the helmet* of SALVATION*
- ✓ *and the sword of the Spirit*, which is the WORD OF GOD...”

Only now are we fully and completely armed for battle. Only now are we ready to stand fast in the evil day. So this morning, let's make sure that each one of us are taking that helmet of salvation and wearing it every day into the battle.

* Once again, this helmet of salvation is in some sense the same helmet that God Himself wears when He goes to battle in the person of His Messiah. In some sense, God gives us His own armor to wear! Isaiah 59:15–18 — Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; 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. (Instead of the common feminine noun, Paul uses the neuter adjective for “salvation” in Ephesians 6, thus even more clearly showing his dependence on the passage in Isaiah, which also uses the neuter adjective.)

I. “And take THE HELMET of salvation”

Here’s how some commentators have described the Roman soldier’s helmet:

“It generally was made of bronze fitted over an iron skull cap lined with leather or cloth. During Claudius’ reign (A.D. 37-41) the helmet was revised so that it covered the back of the neck, fitting slightly over the shoulder, a brow-ridge fitted above the face to protect the nose and eyes, and hinged cheek pieces were fastened by a chin-band to protect the face.” (Hoehner)

So in other words, “it protected not only the head [and face] but also the neck and shoulders.” (Thielman) The helmet is truly an absolutely essential part of the Christian’s armor. Not one of us in our right minds should ever dare to be without it. So then, what *is* the Christian’s helmet? It’s the helmet of *salvation*.

II. “And take the helmet OF SALVATION”

Now we know that every piece of armor is essential. In the end, all of the pieces of armor are connected together and interrelated. But *this* is the piece of armor that makes me smile the most – the kind of smile that I can’t wipe off my face. This is the piece of armor that fills me up with joy.

The helmet that God has given to each one of us in the battle *is salvation*. “*Stand* therefore,” Paul says. (aorist imperative). “*Take* the helmet of salvation.” (aorist imperative) In other words, “Stand, therefore, *by taking* the helmet of salvation.” But *how* do we *take* salvation? Maybe first of all we need to ask, “*What is* this salvation that Paul is talking about?”

When you hear that word “*salvation*,” what do you think of? “*Salvation*.” Do you think of something in the past? Regardless of what you may know in your head, is it the *past* that you primarily think of when you hear that word “salvation”? Do you think of that moment when you were born again and made a new creation in Christ? Do you think of that moment in the past when your sins were forgiven and God declared you to be righteous in Christ? Sometimes Paul speaks of salvation as already accomplished in the past.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:8 (cf. 2:5) — For by grace *you have been saved* through faith.
- ✓ 2 Timothy 1:8–9 — Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, *who saved us* and called us to a holy calling...

So is this what Paul has in mind here? Is he thinking uniquely of the helmet of our *past, accomplished* salvation? If so, then how would we “take” this helmet of our past salvation? One commentator says that “we are to appropriate [our past] salvation more fully and live in the light of [our] status in Christ” (O’Brien; cf. Thielman). Many *very good* commentators hold this view that the salvation Paul has in mind is uniquely and especially our *past* salvation (cf. Thielman; O’Brien; Hoehner; Lincoln; Bruce; Hodge;

Lenski). Some of them hold this view very strongly. They point out that in the rest of Ephesians, Paul's main focus is on a salvation that we *already have* – even to the point that we have already been seated with Christ in the heavenly places. That's very true. But on the other hand, Paul already reminded us of our *past* salvation when he spoke of having shod our feet with the preparedness that comes from the Gospel of peace. That was our past salvation. We have been reconciled with God (we have been forgiven and made new), so that we are even now at peace with God – and this means that we can truly *be* at peace every single day of our lives. It seems strange to me that the helmet of salvation would basically be a repeat of another piece of armor. So what is this salvation that Paul is talking about?

Here's something that's so desperately important for us all to see and understand. When the Bible speaks of "salvation," it very rarely separates out the past from the present, or the present from the future. It very rarely has in mind only the past, or only the present, or only the future. When the Bible uses that word "saved," or "salvation," we're usually meant to be thinking of the whole thing – past, present, and future all wrapped up in **one** (cf. Braune). Salvation is an awesome thing – truly even more awesome that we have ever comprehended. In his evangelistic sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel:

- ✓ Acts 2:21 — And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be *saved*.

Is Peter talking about being justified and having our sins forgiven right now, or is Peter talking about our final deliverance, and rescue, and glory when Christ returns? He's talking about it *all!* He's talking about *both!* The Old Testament often pictured the final, end times *salvation* as happening *all at once* – so that forgiveness of sins and changed hearts led immediately into the new heavens and new earth. That *was* salvation – *all* of it *together*. In the New Testament, we see that life in the new heavens and new earth doesn't actually follow *immediately*, and yet it's still just *one* salvation. Somehow we forget this, though, and so we end up either with a *salvation* only in the *past*, or a salvation that's been chopped into two or three different pieces. Think of that famous verse in Acts chapter four:

- ✓ Acts 4:12 (cf. 13:47) — And there is *salvation* in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be *saved*.

What is this salvation? It's not just our past justification, but also our future glorification. It's the whole "end times" salvation that the Old Testament prophets anticipated. Paul says in Romans chapter one:

- ✓ Romans 1:16 (cf. 10:9-10) — For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for *salvation* to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

So what *part* of salvation is Paul talking about? How can we say that he's talking about one part and not the other? He's talking about the whole thing all wrapped up as one – past, present, and future.

- ✓ Acts 16:30–31 — Then [the jailor] brought [Paul and Silas] out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be *saved*?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be *saved*, you and your household.”

The Philippian jailor wasn't just thinking about the present forgiveness of his sins – he also had in mind his final deliverance and blessedness on the Day of Judgment. We don't have three separate salvations – one past, one present, and one future! We have one salvation. We don't have one salvation chopped up into three separate parts – one past, one present, and one future! We have only one salvation. We have only one salvation with three stages that build one upon the other – an accomplished beginning, an “in process” middle, and then the *grand finale* on that future day when Christ returns.

If we were saved from the *penalty* of sin in the *past*, then what's the ultimate point? Isn't it that future day when the Judge of all the world metes out the penalty for sin, and we are delivered and welcomed into His kingdom? If we are “being saved” from the *power* of sin in the present (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:15; Rom. 6), then what's the ultimate point? Isn't it that future day when this process of “being saved” is finished and we are rescued even from the presence of sin in that new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells (cf. 2 Pet. 3:13). If our salvation is already past and already present, then this is just the guarantee that *our salvation* must still be *future*. So the beginning and middle stages of our salvation are by their very nature always pointing us forward and moving us onward to that future grand finale of our salvation. God's salvation is not something static, but something living and breathing.

Maybe we could say that God's salvation is like a river. It's already bubbled up from the spring in the mountain, [PAST] now it's gathering strength as it flows through valleys and woodlands and plains, [PRESENT] and eventually, one day, it will be released into the vast and measureless sea of God's everlasting love and joy. [FUTURE] Or maybe we could say that God's salvation is like a tree. The seed has already germinated and come to life, [PAST] now it's growing and developing and taking shape, [PRESENT] and one day it will burst into flower and bloom and bear eternal and everlasting fruit. [FUTURE] You see, it's impossible to hear that word, “*salvation*,” without thinking of that future climax to which everything else both past and present is leading, and building, and moving. Just look at these verses:

- ✓ Titus 3:4–7 — But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he *saved* us... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [PAST] so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs [PRESENT] according to the *hope* of eternal life. [FUTURE]

- ✓ Hebrews 9:28 — Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, [**PAST**] will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to *save* those who are *eagerly waiting* for him. [**FUTURE**]
- ✓ 1 Peter 1:3–5 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again [**PAST**] to a living *hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [**FUTURE**] who by God’s power are being guarded through faith [**PRESENT**] for a *salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time. [**FUTURE**]
- ✓ Romans 5:9–10 — Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, [**PAST**] much more shall we be *saved* by him from the wrath of God. [**FUTURE**] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, [**PAST**] much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be *saved* by his life. [**FUTURE**]
- ✓ Romans 8:23–24 — And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, [**PAST**] groan inwardly as we *wait eagerly* for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this *hope* [**FUTURE**] we were *saved*. [**PAST**]

The past is the past, and the present is the present, and the future is the future, and yet they’re all bound up together as *one great salvation*. The past and present stages of our salvation are always pointing us, and leading us, and moving us forward to that awesome future grand finale of our salvation. And that explains why when the biblical writers use that word, “salvation,” *if* they’re emphasizing any one stage of our salvation it seems to be, more often than not, our *future* salvation!

- ✓ Romans 13:11 — You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For *salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed*.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul actually uses the very same analogy of a helmet:

- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:8–9 — Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and *for a helmet the hope of salvation*. For *God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now maybe you’re saying to yourself, “Why didn’t we just start here? Doesn’t this verse make it obvious what Paul was talking about in Ephesians 6?” Not necessarily. Charles Hodge says: “1 Thessalonians 5:8... does not authorize us to understand [the ‘helmet of salvation’ in Ephesians] as a figurative designation of ‘hope.’ The two passages, though alike, are not identical. In the one salvation is said to be our helmet, in the other hope.” OK. That’s a good point. But then we have to ask: “What is our salvation if it’s not completely and totally wrapped up with a future hope?” Another commentator says that we are not to “read the idea of hope into” the helmet of salvation. (Lincoln) But why should we have to? At the very heart of that word “salvation” *is* the whole idea of our future hope – of a salvation that yet *awaits* its grand finale – of a salvation that even now is building towards it’s grand finale. Even in Ephesians, for all of Paul’s talk about how much of God’s salvation we already have, he never forgets that this present experience of

salvation is but the *promise* of that awesome grand finale of our salvation still yet to come.[†]

- ✓ Ephesians 1:4 (cf. Eph. 5:5-6) — He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, [PAST] *that* we should be holy and blameless before him. [FUTURE]
- ✓ Ephesians 2:5-7 — [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [PAST] *so that* in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [FUTURE]
- ✓ Ephesians 4:30 — And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed [PAST] *for* the day of redemption [FUTURE].
- ✓ Ephesians 5:25-27 — Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [PAST] *so that* he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. [FUTURE]
- ✓ Ephesians 1:11-12 — In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined... [PAST] *so that* we who were the first to *hope* in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. [FUTURE]
- ✓ Ephesians 1:18 — The eyes of your hearts being enlightened, [PAST] that you may know [PRESENT] what is the *hope* to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. [FUTURE]
- ✓ Ephesians 1:13-14 — In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your *salvation*, [PAST/PRESENT/FUTURE] and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [PAST] who is the guarantee of our inheritance [PRESENT] until we acquire possession of it, [FUTURE] to the praise of his glory.
- ✓ The whole theme of Ephesians is this: “The mystery of God’s will for the administration [PAST AND PRESENT] of the fullness of the times [FUTURE] to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him.” (Eph. 1:9-10; cf. 3:20-21)

So let’s go back now to the two questions we started off with. When Paul tells us to take the helmet of salvation, *what is* this salvation that he has in mind? It’s like a tree that’s already germinated and come to life, [PAST] now it’s growing and developing and taking shape, [PRESENT] and one day it will burst into flower and bloom and bear eternal and everlasting fruit. [FUTURE] It’s like a river that’s already bubbled up from the spring in the mountain, [PAST] now it’s gathering strength as it flows through valleys and woodlands and plains, [PRESENT] and eventually, one day, it will be released into the vast and measureless sea of God’s everlasting love and joy. [FUTURE] The beginning and middle stages of our salvation are by their very nature always pointing us forward and moving us onward to that future grand finale of our salvation.[‡] And so it’s impossible

[†] Paul hasn’t forgotten either about our desperate *need* for that future grand finale of our salvation. Ephesians 5:5-6 — For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has *no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God*. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the *wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*.

[‡] It is "a present deliverance from sin to be consummated in eternity by complete deliverance from every kind of evil" (Wood, quoting Beet).

to hear that word, “*salvation*,” without thinking of that future climax to which everything else both past and present is *leading, and building, and moving* – when it’s granted to us to eat from the trees that line the river, and to drink from the water of that river that flows out from the throne of God, and to see with our own eyes the Lamb of God who took away our sins, and to have every tear wiped away, and every pain erased, and to have true joy unspeakable and full of glory completely undimmed and untainted by any sin, and to perfectly enjoy God’s creation as it was meant to be, and to know perfect fellowship and love for all of our glorified brothers and sisters in the family of God, and on, and on, and on. This is the *salvation* that is to be our helmet in the battle.

III. “AND TAKE the helmet of salvation”

So how do we *take* this helmet and *put it on* every day in our intense struggle against the evil one? *Hope*.[§] Faith takes God at His word – whether His word speaks to the past, or the present, or the future. But biblical hope is uniquely that which looks ahead to the future and waits, eagerly, for what is still to come. So Paul says that “we exult in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2) We “rejoice in hope.” (Rom. 12:12) We “abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13) We are to be “steadfast in hope” (1 Thess. 1:3; cf. Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:6; 6:11; 10:23)

As Christians, hope has been hardwired into our DNA *because* the grand finale of God’s salvation still awaits us, and every day it’s closer to us than it was the day before.

- ✓ 1 John 3:2–3 — Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
- ✓ Titus 2:11–13 (cf. Heb. 6:17–20) — The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
- ✓ 1 Peter 1:13 — Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

“Stand, therefore,” brothers and sisters, “having girded your waist with **TRUTH**, and having put on the breastplate of **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and having shod your feet with the PREPAREDNESS that comes from THE GOSPEL OF **PEACE**,”

in all things, having taken up the shield of **FAITH** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

And take [every day!] the helmet of **SALVATION**.”

- ✓ Romans 15:13 — [Now] may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

[§] Cf. Calvin; Wood; Hendriksen; MacArthur; Fergusson