

Jesus Juva

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ARMOR OF CHRIST

LESSON ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Think Differently”

The animals of the forest are having a game of pick-up touch football, as envisioned by Bob Thaves, the creator of the comic Frank & Ernest. The skunk pleads with the raccoon quarterback, “Trust me, I can get open.” And I am sure he can “get open,” for as accepting as we would like to be, some people “just stink,” and we do all that we can to avoid their stench. Between disagreeable people and unfortunate events, life is not always an easy and enjoyable journey. We find ourselves playing the game with someone we would really desire was on the other team, compounded by being tackled, blindsided, by adversity.

I am saddened that we have been so indoctrinated by a fundamentalist theology that we are consumed with burdensome guilt to admit what we know to be true – that there are some people we just do not like. There are people who we find to be boorish, obnoxious, haughty, moody, self-centered, and worse mean and vindictive, grudge bearing and hostile that we actively avoid. In the “air” of their presence a surgical mask suffices not.

When I was too young to understand, my father gave me some notable advice. It was so abhorrent to my Sunday school lessons that I cast it off in disbelief, and only as an adult did I come to understand and agree. Dad said, “One of the most loving things you can do is avoid someone who does not like you.” Did not my fourth grade Sunday school teacher at Delaware Avenue Methodist Church, with the huge picture of Jesus on the wall, tell us to love everybody? But maybe my Dad, a reserved man who confined

himself on Sundays to the basement kitchen of the church, counting the offering, realized that love was the absence of confrontation. Perhaps it is not bad theology, but good, to step off the curb and cross the street when a foe approaches. Reconciliation being an absent option, is not love found in the avoidance of conflict?

Frank and Ernest are sitting on a park bench. Frank, disheveled and penniless, says to his companion, "Every time I try to seize the day, it turns out to know judo." Not only do we have problems with cohorts, but each day can be a wrestling match. And too often, shoulders pinned, we hear the count of three. As Bob Hope once said in a monologue, "I was called 'Rembrandt' Hope in my boxing days, because I spent so much time on the canvas." As it is said of roses, they do come on stems of thorns. So how are we to smell the roses while avoid being pricked by the dilemmas of the day? To be honest, we cannot.

Ziggy, lying on the bed of self-disclosure in a psychiatrist's office, makes this admission, "On the highway of life...I always forget to buckle up!" How are we to secure ourselves from the unavoidable collisions when someone or something trespasses our right-of-way?

I have discovered the most meaningful answer is in Paul's admonition: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." (Eph 6:10-18)

Each morning I follow the same prayer routine. I always open my meditation by praying on the Armor of Christ. As I do so I envision getting dressed, piece by piece. I put on the pants of truth, that I may be honest in the proclamation of the scriptures. I adorn my shirt of righteousness, that I may be a devout individual. I bend over to tie my shoes of peace, that wherever I may walk I will be the barer of tranquility. I place upon my head the hat of salvation, a reminder that I am a sinner in need of forgiving others. I take up my shield of faith, noting that it is to protect me from evil. Then I take the sword, knowing that if I speak and act with the power of the Holy Spirit I can transform lives, alter situations, and deal constructively with the unpleasanties of the day. This does not mean I will like everyone, nor does it mean the day won't be prickly, but it does mean I have a spiritual base to endure it constructively. I am human; it is a prayer that my humanness can be tempered by the Holy Spirit. Then maybe I can live by the philosophy of Will Rogers, "I hope we never live to see the day when a thing is as bad as some newspapers make it."

Tony Snow, the former White House Press Secretary who is suffering from incurable colon cancer, wrote an essay titled, "Cancer's Unexpected Blessings." Realizing the disease will not seek remission, he reported on his face-to-face confrontation with death. He penned, "Finally, we can let love change everything. When Jesus faced the prospect of the crucifixion he grieved not for himself, but for us. He cried for Jerusalem before entering the holy city. From the Cross, he took on the cumulative burden of human sin and weakness, and begged forgiveness on our behalf. We get repeated chances to learn that life is not about us – that we acquire purpose and satisfaction by sharing in God's love for others. Sickness gets us partway there. It reminds us of our limitations and dependence. But it also gives us a chance to serve the healthy. A minister friend of mine observes that people suffering afflictions often acquire the faith of two people, while loved ones accept the burden of two people's worries and fears."

It is with the Armor of Christ that we are protected, but not insulated, by God from heartache and sorrow, disappointment and despair. It is the Armor of Christ that provides us with the gifts of the Spirit to be ambassadors of goodwill. But the armor is useless absent of an accompanying attitude that it actually does work. This is perhaps

why we ought to adopt the motto of Apple computer C.E.O., Steve Jobs, as he challenges his team, “Think Differently.”

Soli Deo Gloria,

Ron Love