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MIND THY HEAD

Ephesians 6:17a

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Ephesians Lesson 60

Mind Thy Head!
Ephesians 6:17a

I don't remember where it was, but I was about to go down a stairway that had a low entrance. Above it was a sign that read, "Mind Thy Head!" It meant, "Look out or you will hit your head!"

As I ride my bike around town and notice other bike riders, I'm amazed at how many people ride bicycles in city traffic, but they're not wearing helmets to protect their heads. I once read an article about a medical doctor who went for a short bike ride around her neighborhood, without a helmet. I don't remember whether a car hit her or she hit a curb or what, but she was thrown from her bike and suffered a serious head injury. She had to give up her medical practice because of that injury, which could have been prevented if she had been wearing a helmet. Mind thy head!

I'm also amazed at how many Christians do not mind their heads. They swim in the currents of worldly ideas and entertainment without developing a Christian mind. They're oblivious to the godless philosophic assumptions that underlie worldly thinking. They buy into the postmodern idea that there is no such thing as knowable, absolute truth in the spiritual or moral realms. These careless Christians ignore, or sometimes even ridicule, the need for sound doctrine. They want experience, not doctrine. They want good feelings, not careful thinking. Because they do not mind their heads, they are not transformed by the renewing of their minds. Rather, they are conformed to this evil world (Rom. 12:1-2). God gives us the helmet of salvation so that we will mind our heads:

To stand firm against the enemy, take the helmet of salvation.

Just before going into battle, the Roman soldier would put on a helmet, either made of bronze or of leather with pieces of metal covering it. It also had cheek pieces to protect part of his face. Paul here draws on Isaiah 59:17, where it says of the Lord as the righteous Judge and Warrior, "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a man-

tle." Isaiah was picturing God going forth into battle to bring deliverance to His people by judging their enemies. But in Ephesians, Paul pictures believers putting on the helmet of salvation to protect themselves in the conflict with the enemy. The genitive is one of apposition, meaning, "the helmet, which is salvation."

1. The helmet protects your head from the enemy's attacks.

Your head is a very important part of your body, because it contains your brain, which controls everything.

A. Your head determines how you think about all of life.

How you think in large part determines how you feel and how you act. As Jonathan Edwards said, "The ideas and images in men's minds are the invisible powers that constantly govern them" (source unknown). For example, if you're an angry person, it is (to put it bluntly) because you are thinking selfishly. You think, "I have *my* rights! I'm not going to let that person treat *me* that way! I want *my* way!" Angry people think that the world owes them something. How they think determines how they feel about life and how they act. In the worst cases, they injure or kill others to get what they want. But it all stems from their thinking (Mark 7:21).

How you think determines your worldview, which also affects how you feel and act. A person with a postmodern worldview does not believe in moral absolutes. They do not think anything is absolutely evil. They do not believe in judging the behavior of others as wrong. Maybe homosexuality is not their thing, but who are they to say that it is wrong? That would be intolerant and judgmental, which are the only absolutely wrong attitudes for a postmodernist! As I mentioned when I dealt with the belt of truth, many young people are even hesitant to say that the Holocaust was morally evil. They don't like it, but they won't come out and say that it was evil for Hitler to kill six million Jews!

Ideas create worldviews and worldviews shape the world. Marla and I just watched the movie, "Expelled," which shows how the idea of Darwinian evolution (an untouchable dogma of the current educational establishment) was at the root of Hitler's extermination of the Jews. It is also at the root of Planned Parenthood's killing unwanted babies. The point is, your head determines how you think about all of life. To put on the helmet of salvation re-

quires that you learn to think biblically about the predominant worldviews. You must develop a Christian mind, a saved mind.

B. Your head determines how you function in all of life.

If your brain is not working properly, it affects how other parts of your body work. A brain injury can affect motor skills or the ability to speak or think clearly. If a soldier got knocked unconscious by a blow to the head, he was probably doomed. He had to guard his head by having his helmet securely in place.

Spiritually, salvation determines how we live in this sinful world. We live as pilgrims who have been rescued from this present evil kingdom of Satan. We live in subjection to Jesus Christ as Lord and King. We view everything—values, money, entertainment, the arts, or politics—from the perspective of being saved people. Understanding the doctrine of salvation equips us to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. Salvation is the foundational doctrine to understand cognitively and to know experientially. Putting on the helmet of salvation protects everything in your life.

C. Your head determines how you relate to others.

Once you put on the helmet of salvation, you realize that all people are in one of two (and *only* two) camps: either they are saved and going to heaven; or, they are lost and going to hell. If a person is not saved, then he cannot understand the things of God. They are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14). He is blind to much of his own sin. He is living for himself and his own futile goals. He has false views about death and eternity, thinking that if there is a heaven, he's probably good enough to go there. But even if he is a relatively good person by worldly standards, in God's sight he has a depraved mind (Rom. 1:28).

But because you have put on the helmet of salvation, you relate to people differently than you did before. You now love the people of God, whom you avoided before. You now view lost people with compassion and understanding, yearning that they would come to know God through Jesus Christ. You do not view lost people as the enemy, but as victims of the enemy. While you can no longer join with them in their course of sinful behavior (1 Pet. 4:3-4), you pray for their salvation and look for opportunities

to talk with them about the Savior. Putting on the helmet of salvation means that you relate differently to the world.

So when Paul tells us to take the helmet of salvation, he is saying, "Don't go into the world with your head unprotected. Mind thy head!" It determines how you think, how you function in all of life, and how you relate to people. As someone said, "Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions; watch your actions, they become habits; watch your habits, they become character; watch your character, for it becomes your destiny" (Frank Outlaw, in *Readers' Digest* [date unknown]). The helmet protects your head. But, we need to think more about why it is called "the helmet of *salvation*."

2. Salvation means that God has rescued you from the penalty of sin; He is rescuing you from the power of sin; and He will rescue you from the presence of sin.

Many commentators (including William Gurnall in his classic, *The Christian in Complete Armor* [Banner of Truth] and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier* [Baker]), interpret our text in light of 1 Thessalonians 5:8, where Paul says to put on "as a helmet the hope of salvation." They say that the emphasis in Ephesians 6:17 is on the future aspect of salvation, namely, our hope. But, it seems to me that if Paul wanted to emphasize that aspect here, he easily could have put in the word "hope," as he does in 1 Thessalonians. Therefore, I think that he is emphasizing the entirety of salvation, past, present, and future, as taught throughout Scripture. Putting on the helmet of salvation means that you are to think about all of life from the perspective of God's full salvation.

- A. Salvation means that God has rescued you from the penalty of sin through faith in Christ's death on the cross.

There are four things to note here:

- (1) To understand salvation properly you must take the doctrine of the fall seriously.

Salvation is a radical word. It's so commonplace today that we don't think about what it really means. To be saved, you must be helplessly, hopelessly lost. To be saved means that God rescued you from a condition where you could do nothing to rescue yourself. You were dead in your transgressions (Eph. 2:1). Before God

began to work in your life, you didn't know that you were lost and you didn't desire to be saved. You were not seeking God.

But when God began to work in your life, the Holy Spirit began to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He opened your eyes to see your true guilt before God. He showed you the impossible standard of perfect righteousness that God demands. He showed you that you were headed for judgment and sure condemnation before the holy Sovereign of the universe. In other words, you began to see your need for salvation.

I have used this illustration before, but it may help you to see what I'm talking about. Suppose you're standing in line at the bank when I rush in, grab you by the arm, yank you out of line, and drag you out of the bank. You would probably be quite upset with me. You'd say, "What do you think you're doing? You just made me lose my place in line. You tore my shirt. You hurt my arm. And you made me look stupid in front of all those people!"

But what if the bank had just been taken over by terrorists who threatened to kill one hostage every ten minutes if their demands were not met? Just when you felt desperate as you saw that you were doomed, with no way of escape, suddenly I rushed in, grabbed you, and saved you from those terrorists. You'd say, "Thank you so much for what you just did! I'll be forever grateful for your kindness!"

To appreciate the helmet of salvation that God provides in Christ, you must take your fallen condition seriously. You must recognize that you are guilty and condemned, with no human way out of your sentence of execution.

- (2) Receiving the helmet of salvation implies that salvation is God's gift, not something we earn or merit.

The word *take* is literally, *receive*, *accept*, or *welcome*. It implies what we saw earlier in Ephesians, that salvation is God's gift. Paul stated (2:5), "even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Grace means that salvation is an undeserved favor or gift. To make sure that we understand this vital truth, Paul repeats (2:8-9), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of your-

selves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

I want to make sure that you understand this vital truth, because it is probably the most commonly misunderstood aspect of salvation. If you are from a Roman Catholic background, you may not understand this truth, because the Catholic Church teaches that you must add your good works to God’s grace in order to merit salvation. Catholics go to mass and pray the rosary and do penance and other good deeds in the hope that someday they will have enough merit to get them into heaven. But they can never be sure that they have enough merit stored up. Tragically, they miss out on God’s salvation, which requires that you simply receive by faith the gift of what Christ did for you on the cross. But to receive it, you must let go of your good works as the basis for your acceptance with God and trust in Christ alone.

(3) To understand salvation properly, you must understand the reason for Christ’s death.

Some wonder, “Why did Jesus Christ have to die on the cross for my sins? When someone wrongs me, I just forgive him. Why couldn’t God just forgive me?”

The answer is, because God is perfectly holy and just, but you are not. God would compromise His perfect holiness and justice if He forgave sinners apart from the payment of the penalty His justice demands: “The wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23). If that penalty is not paid, God would be an unjust judge, letting the guilty go free without justice being met. Because of His great love, God sent His own Son to pay the penalty that you deserve. Christ’s shed blood satisfied God’s holy justice on behalf of all that receive the gift of salvation by faith alone. If you believe in Jesus Christ and His shed blood as the payment for your sins, you will not perish, but have eternal life. But there is one other implication of the fact that salvation is God’s rescuing you from the penalty of sin:

(4) The helmet of salvation implies that the Christian mind is a regenerated mind.

When God saves us, He makes us new creatures in Christ. We saw this in Ephesians 4:17-24, where Paul contrasts unbelievers with believers. Unbelievers “walk in the futility of their mind, being

darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (4:17-18). But we have laid aside that old self (lit., man), and are being "renewed in the spirit of [our] mind" and have "put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (4:23, 24). Salvation dramatically changes the way that we live, how we think, the values that we hold, and the motives behind our actions. Putting on the helmet of salvation involves reminding yourself daily of the dramatic changes that God brought about in your life when He rescued you from the penalty of sin through faith in Christ.

B. Salvation means that God is rescuing you from the power of sin through the resurrection life of Christ in you.

Paul explains this in Romans 5, 6, & 7, where he shows that believers are identified with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Now that we are raised to newness of life in Him, sin no longer has dominion over us (Rom. 6:1-14). He writes (Rom. 6:11), "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." The resurrection life of Christ, through His indwelling Holy Spirit, enables us to walk in newness of life, free from the power of sin. There are two implications of this:

(1) You should be growing in holiness and experiencing consistent victory over sin.

While this is a lifelong process and there will be frequent failures and setbacks, the overall curve should be one of growing obedience and victory over sin. One of the most helpful things I have learned about this process is to judge and put to death my sin on the thought level (Matt. 5:27-30; Mark 7:20-23). If you're constantly disobeying God and yielding to temptation, you need to find a spiritual mentor who can help you devise a strategy for victory. No Christian needs to live in constant bondage to sin. In fact, if you continue happily in sin, with no fight to overcome it, you should question whether you truly are saved. Salvation in the present tense is salvation from the dominion of sin in your daily life.

(2) You should be growing in assurance of salvation.

As you grow in obedience to God, you should be growing in assurance that He has truly saved you. Most modern evangelistic

training instructs us to give immediate assurance of salvation right after a person prays to receive Christ as Savior. But our Puritan brothers may have been wiser than we are. They viewed assurance as a blessing that we grow into as we grow in faith and obedience.

The first line of assurance is, "Have you trusted in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior and Lord?" If you answer "yes," the next question is, "since it is possible to be deceived about believing in Christ (Matt. 7:21-23), how can you know that your faith is genuine?" The Book of First John is devoted to answering that question (1 John 5:13). The apostle goes through three lines of evidence to test your faith. Do you confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God in human flesh (2:18-28; 4:1-6; 5:5-12)? Do you love the brethren (2:7-11; 3:11-20; 4:7-21)? And, do you obey Christ's commandments (2:3-6; 3:4-10)?

Putting on the helmet of salvation means daily affirming your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, loving your fellow Christians, and obeying Christ's commandments. This will give you growing assurance that you are saved. It is a strong defense against the attacks of the enemy, who tries to get you to doubt your salvation.

So the past aspect of the helmet of salvation is that God has rescued you from the penalty of sin through faith in Christ. The present aspect of salvation is that God is rescuing you from the power of sin, which gives you assurance of salvation. But there's also a future aspect:

- C. Salvation means that God will rescue you from the presence of sin through the second coming of Jesus Christ.

John writes (1 John 3:2-3), "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." One commentator puts it, salvation is "a present deliverance from sin to be consummated in eternity by complete deliverance from every kind of evil" (J. Agar Beet, cited by A Skevington Wood, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], 11:88). What a glorious joy it will be to be forever in heaven with Christ, free from even the temptation to sin, dwelling with the saints and angels in a sin-free place!

Conclusion

Someone has said, "What you *think* means more than anything else in your life. More than what you earn, more than where you live, more than your social position, and more than what anyone else may think about you" (George Adams, in "Bits & Pieces" [11/84], p. 15).

God commands you to receive the helmet of salvation to protect how you think about the many worldly ideas that bombard you daily. Thinking that is protected by the helmet of salvation will enable you to live rightly before God and rightly in relation to others. Salvation means that God has rescued you in the past from the penalty of sin through your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. He is rescuing you in the present from the power of sin through the resurrection life of Christ in you. He will rescue you in the future from the presence of sin when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory.

So, mind thy head! Don't go out into the battlefield of the world without your helmet on! Stand firm against the enemy by taking the helmet of salvation!

Application Questions

1. Practically, how can Christians learn to be discerning biblical thinkers? What steps would you recommend?
2. Salvation is *not by* good works, but it is *unto* good works (Eph. 2:8-10). Why is this distinction *crucial* to maintain?
3. Why must we take the fall seriously in order to understand salvation properly? What errors ensue if we don't (see Luke 7:47).
4. How would you counsel a Christian who is constantly defeated by sin? To turn things around, where should he begin?

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