

The Armor of God, Part One

Ephesians 6:13-18

The last time we were in Ephesians we talked about our unseen Enemy, and how he is stronger and smarter than we are, and we've emphasized that we need the strength of the Lord in this spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged. We pointed out the reality of the war, and said that we cannot do this by ourselves—that we need not only the strength of the Lord, but we also need each other.

Today we are nearing the end of our tour of the Grand Canyon of Scripture. We're going to explore this passage of Scripture which tells us that God has provided for us the exact armor that we need for going out to do battle with the forces of darkness. We're going to describe the various pieces only briefly, because the real things we need to focus on are why those pieces are important for us as believers in our day. In other words, *why* is it important that we put on the belt of truth or the breastplate of righteousness, or any of the other pieces? In fact, why is it important that we put on the armor of God at all?

John MacArthur is a well-known pastor and Bible scholar from California. In his commentary on Ephesians he makes this observation:

It is easy for believers—especially in the Western world, where the church is generally prosperous and respected—to be complacent and become oblivious to the seriousness of the battle around them. They rejoice in “victories” that involve no battles and in a kind of peace that is merely the absence of conflict. Theirs is the victory and peace of the draft dodger or defector who refuses to fight. They are not interested in armor because they are not engaged in the war.

In describing our spiritual enemy, MacArthur goes on to say:

This is the supernatural enemy who rebelled against God in His own heavens, who succeeded in luring man from innocence to sin in the Garden of Eden, who repeatedly tried to destroy God's chosen people, Israel. This is the enemy who tried to stop the birth, ministry, and resurrection of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. This is the enemy of unequalled wickedness who seeks to thwart Christ's coming again and who will oppose Him with desperate and unprecedented fierceness when He does return.

Because we are facing such a formidable foe as this, in Ephesians 6:13 we read that we are to “*put on the full armor of God.*” Not a little part of it, not just the parts that are easy to wear or that make us look good, but the whole of it. Romans 13:14 commands us to “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Does God's Word contradict itself? No. So if in one place we are told to “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ,*” and in another we are told to “*put on the whole armor of God,*” we

must conclude that the two are actually the same thing. When I put on the whole armor of God, I am putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. I put on the Lord Jesus Christ, not by going through the various parts of the armor in my head in some mental exercise, but by entering into a relationship with the living God. So if today you do not have a living, vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, I plead with you to settle that issue before another hour goes by.

“Put on the full armor of God.” But then Paul goes on to tell us why this is necessary: *“so that when—when, not if!—“the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.”* The day of evil would be any day when we find ourselves dealing with darkness, which is every day, if we only had our eyes opened spiritually. So we learn that even if we are eager and willing to be used by God in this spiritual warfare, we dare not go out without proper equipment.

Verse thirteen then tells us that we need to put on the full armor of God so that we *“may be able to stand our ground.”* The verse continues, *“after you have done everything, to stand.”* Paul was using a military term here which means “to hold your position.” I’ve never been on a literal battlefield when there was warfare going on, but I would imagine that it would be important to still be standing at the end of the battle! Paul is saying to us, “Make sure that you take all the precautions necessary so that when it’s all over you will still be standing firm in your position.”

Then in verse fourteen, he goes on to describe what the armor of God looks like. Most Bible scholars believe that Paul was in prison as he was writing this, and that he had been observing a Roman soldier standing there perhaps guarding him. He drew some parallels between what that soldier wore, and the provisions God has made for us in this spiritual battle. And he tells us that we are to put on

The Belt of **Truth**

The Breastplate of **Righteousness**

The Gospel of **Peace**

The Shield of **Faith**

The Helmet of **Salvation**

The Sword of the **Spirit**

Every one of these areas—truth, righteousness, peace, faith, our salvation, and the Word of God—is a primary area where Satan attacks. There is so much wonderful truth contained in these that rather than rush through it just for the sake of getting through it, today we’re going to take a brief look at only the first three, and discover what God has for us here.

1 The Belt of Truth, v. 14a

In verse 14, Paul tells us to *“stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.”*

The belt of the Roman soldier was more than just the belt that men wear today to hold our pants up. It was a leather belt with a metal apron that hung down in front. The Roman

soldier always wore a tunic, the basic outer garment that hung loosely over the body. In battle, however, that tunic could be dangerous, so it was always gathered up and held securely in place by this belt. The belt helped the soldier get ready for action. The same thing is true for us in this spiritual war.

There is so much falsehood in our world! Remember that Satan is the father of lies, that he does not delight in the truth, that many times he will twist what is true to suit his own ends. As we move through history and closer to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, the forces of darkness will step up their efforts to deceive even the elect. Jesus Himself told us that in the last days that *“false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible”* (Matthew 24:24).

Truth is what helps us get ready for action! In fact, none of us should even think about living one more hour without exposing ourselves to the truth of God, without grasping for an accurate understanding of what God’s Word says. Every day we live should be lived in truth. Paul has already told us in this letter, in 4:25, that each of us is to *“put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”* But this truth is more than just telling the truth to each other. This is to acknowledge that our God is a God of truth. In what has been called “The High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus, John 17, Jesus Himself prayed about us to His Father, *“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth”* (v. 17).

There are some in our world who would tell us that there is no such thing as real truth, that truth is “relative” according to the situation we might find ourselves in. They might say things such as “What is true for you may not be true for me.” And if you will pardon my saying so, there is some “truth” in that. For example, it may be true that you are rich, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that everyone is rich, does it? The problem comes when we say that there is no absolute truth, which would be a concept or a principle that is always true in every situation or time. But even a statement such as “There is no absolute truth,” is *itself* an absolute truth! So the whole argument is a contradiction, and collapses on itself. In order for our world to survive, there *have* to be things that are true and things that are not true.

It is a truth that when you step outside your house to go to work or school or come to church, that the law of gravity will prevent you from flying out into space. That is a simple example, but we should remind ourselves that our God is a God of truth, that He is the same today as He was yesterday, and that we must live and walk in that truth as we face an unseen enemy. We should also remind ourselves that one of the main tactics of our enemy is deception, which is falsehood at its very core. Getting ourselves ready for battle by putting on the Belt of Truth protects us from the lies of Satan. It enables us to see things as they really are.

How many times have you made some serious mistakes, how many times have you sinned against God because you didn't follow the truth of God, choosing instead to believe the lies of Satan? We need to put on the Belt of Truth! What we believe really *does* matter. It also matters how we *apply* that truth to any particular situation, and live it out as we go through our lives—which brings us to the next part of our armor.

2 The Breastplate of Righteousness, v. 14b

The second half of verse fourteen adds that we are to have the “*breastplate of righteousness in place.*” See what Paul was seeing. There were different types of breastplates, but the idea was to protect the soldier's vital organs. Why is this important for us?

“The mind and emotions are the two areas where Satan most fiercely attacks believers. He creates a world system, a sinful environment by which he tempts us to think wrong thoughts and to feel wrong emotions. He wants to cloud our minds with false doctrine, false principles, and false information in order to mislead and confuse us. He also wants to confuse our emotions and thereby pervert our affections, morals, loyalties, goals, and commitments. He desires to snatch the Word of God from our minds and replace it with his own perverse ideas. He seeks to undermine pure living and replace it with immorality, greed, envy, hate, and every other vice. He wants us to laugh at sin rather than mourn over it, and to rationalize it rather than confess it and bring it to the Lord for forgiveness. He seduces us to become so used to sin in us and around us that it no longer bothers our conscience.” (John MacArthur, p. 351)

When we “put on” the breastplate of righteousness, we are not putting on our own good works. This is not the breastplate of “self-righteousness.” We're not depending on our own personal integrity or goodness. This does not mean that we read the Bible more or pray more. It doesn't mean that we go to church more, or that we work ourselves into a frenzy in trying to please God through our own good works. Since this is the armor of God, this is not our righteousness at all. In fact, when we suit up in our own self-righteousness, we are handing Satan a weapon for him to use against us! It would be like going out to engage in hand-to-hand combat, wearing only a paper vest. Our righteousness has never been good enough, so why do we attempt to face the trials of our lives in our own strength and goodness?

Listen to this passage from Isaiah 64:6-- “*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*” Listen carefully: that verse is *not* saying that God will not accept you no matter what you do. It is simply saying that even our very best, when compared to the righteousness of God, is like something you would throw away. The problem is that too often we have depended on our own goodness and righteousness as we face the darkness of the world around us. Drive this peg deeply into your heart: we must cast away our

own righteousness as being completely inadequate in this battle, and put on the breastplate of the righteousness of Christ.

In Philippians 3, Paul considered all the “religious” things he had done, all his accomplishments and good deeds, and came to this conclusion: *“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish [cf. “filthy rags”], that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith”* (vv. 8-9).

Going out to do warfare requires that we do good, of course, but it means that we do not depend on our goodness to win the victory. Satan just laughs at our goodness! Even Satan knows the truth that the Bible says all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags. The good news is when we accept the forgiveness that Christ made possible for us, God provides us with *His* righteousness. But wearing the breastplate of righteousness also means that we live out righteousness through choosing to do good and live for Christ through our daily actions.

3 Feet prepared with the Gospel of Peace, v. 15

In verse 15, we are told that we should have our *“feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”* Shoes were essential to the success of a soldier in battle. His entire life might depend on whether or not he had on the proper shoes, because if he lost his footing, his enemy could quickly push him back or down to the ground, and death would quickly follow. A Roman soldier’s sandals were made from thick leather, and studded through the soles with hobnails.

I remember playing Little League baseball, and wearing baseball shoes with rubber cleats on the bottom. The cleats are intended to give the player a firmer footing for almost anything he does. But every one of us boys looked forward to the day when we would move up into the league above us, the one for the older boys. When we got there, we were allowed to wear shoes with steel cleats! That was really something—it meant we were grown, that we were in the “big” leagues; we were playing with the big boys. Professional athletes wear different types of shoes for different conditions and playing surfaces.

Roman soldiers didn’t fool around with rubber cleats. This was serious business, not play. As the army marched, they would travel over rough, hot roads, jagged rocks, thornbushes, and so forth. If a soldier’s feet were bruised or cut he would be no match for any enemy he might face.

The idea behind the word translated as “readiness,” or “preparation” is that we need to be ready for anything that we might encounter. Since we are headed into spiritual battle, we need to make sure that we have a sure foundation for our faith. The phrase *“gospel of peace”* refers to

the good news that we can in fact have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been reconciled to God through His Son and our Savior, and that's Good News!

Listen to these amazing words from Romans 5: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have **peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand....Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”* **Hallelujah!**

Folks, when Satan attacks, you can expect that one of the areas that most certainly will see action in the war is the area of your own relationship with God. Our enemy will do everything in his power to convince you that God could not possibly love you, that you are separated from Him, and that you don't stand a chance. But the truth of Romans 5, and many other places, is what enables us to hold our position in this battle, to stand firm through all the attacks of our enemy, and when everything has been done and said, to still be standing. Make sure your footing is secure, that you do not slip or stumble.

You and I can have victory through our Lord Jesus Christ as we prepare for the spiritual warfare in which we find ourselves. When the Holy Spirit moves in our lives, and we awaken to what He longs to do in us and through us, we also see that there is much opposition in the form of spiritual attack on our lives. Don't be fooled into thinking that it's not there! Put on the whole armor of God!