



## The Armor of God

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Is it ok if I talk to the men for just a second? Guys, we love warriors. We love armor. We love anything that has to do with swords, shields, helmets, and war. Think of Brad Pitt as Achilles in the movie *Troy*. The man is a stud! Think about Russell Crowe as Maximus in the movie *Gladiator*. We all wanted to be him, right? Most men are drawn to these images and truth be told, we'd love to suit up in some armor and get in a fight! Today we call it boxing or the UFC.

Now ladies, while I know you do not like violence, you have to admit that there is something very appealing about Brad Pitt, Russell Crowe and others who play these types of heroic characters.

Whether we like movies about warriors or not doesn't really matter. There is something intriguing to us about their armor. My son absolutely loves playing swords with me. In fact I can't tell you how many times my fingers and hands have been bruised by him.

But to a warrior, his armor is vital to his success. No warrior would go to battle without sufficient, comfortable, well made and reliable armor. Even today we have modern day examples of armor—a firefighter, a baseball catcher, a racecar driver—are just a few examples. The men and women who wear these uniforms would never go into "battle" without them. Armor is for protection. Armor is crucial for success.

But what about the Christian life? The reality is that when you read the Bible it is very clear that we are in a war and that we have an enemy. From Genesis to Revelation the images of warfare and battles are unmistakable. While we do not like these images today, the reality is that the battle we as Christians face is even more real and terrible than any war or enemy our nation has faced.

Unfortunately though, when it comes to talking about spiritual warfare and Satan, there are two extremes that I've seen in the church. The first extreme is we tend to believe that Satan does not exist. He is an imaginary figure that we have made up in order to understand evil and suffering in our world. I am sure many of you know someone with this worldview. I know I do. The other extreme is when Satan is involved in everything! From our flu like symptoms to Osama Bin Laden, Satan has his hands in it all.

The Bible teaches us that the devil is very real. The bottom line is that he hates you and wants to destroy you. The Apostle Peter called him a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. John the Evangelist called him the accuser of the brethren. And here in Ephesians Paul calls

him the devil and tells us about his host of spiritual forces that work with him.

If this is true, if Satan is our very real and very powerful enemy, what, if anything is our protection from him? In other words, how do we fight him? How do we survive spiritual warfare?

The answer is found in Ephesians 6:10-20. It is here that Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians with a battle cry for believers to take arms and to prepare for war. Please turn in your Bibles and look with me starting in verse 10.

### I. The Battle Cry

**"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil"** (Ephesians 6:10–11).

From the outset I need to be honest and say that what I am about to do here in this sermon is only give you just a taste from the thick and juicy steak of these 11 verses. One scholar wrote two volumes alone on these verses if you can believe that! I really do not have the time to summarize all that Paul has said in the book of Ephesians leading up to this point, nor do I really have time to give a detailed and thoughtful reflection on spiritual warfare, the devil, demons, or even a detailed account of each piece of armor. Instead I am going to do my best and serve up a tasty little bite from this text. So if you leave here today and find yourself still hungry, you should be!

In these first two verses Paul makes an emphatic point. He tells the church that a source of strength has been made available to them and it is "in the Lord." He tells us that we need to be strengthened not by our strength, not by the latest self-help book, but by the Lord. It is Jesus who supplies all we need for battle. He is our source of strength. In fact the hope we have as believers is this, the same power (might) that raised Christ from the dead is available for us today.

How do we get this power and strength? We are to put it on. We are told several times to "put on" and "take up" the "full armor" of God. We are not told to put on just pieces of armor, no. We are commanded to put on all of it! The word Paul uses here in the Greek is *panoplian*, which literally means the full armor of a heavily armed soldier. The idea is total dependence on God—full armor.

What does this armor help us do? It helps us to

“stand firm.” We are told several times to “stand firm” or to “withstand” the onslaught. As Christians we are positioned and ready for battle, we can stand firm, only when the armor is put on. We are not soldiers rushing into battle on our own, not Rambo, not a one man job; but we, as a Body of Christ, link up, form a wall of protection together, and fight against the enemy. Remember the book of Ephesians was written to the church in Ephesus, not just individuals. We put on God’s armor both individually and collectively.

So as you see, in just these two verses alone Paul, as our lieutenant commander if you will, sounds the battle alarm and tells us to be strong in the Lord and put on the full armor of God.

But in order to do this what is needed is nothing less than a paradigm shift in thinking and behaving for our culture and for us today. We love being in control. Our country was built on the ideals of hard work, perseverance, and strength. But Paul is arguing that it is impossible to be strong on our own in this battle. In fact, without God’s armor, we will be quickly overpowered and destroyed. The text is crystal clear, only the power of God can defend and deliver us. Now, while the power and the victory is God’s, we have a job to do. Our job is to be strong in the Lord and to put on his armor.

Now let me back up, hit rewind, and be clear. Christ has already won the battle against Satan and his forces. He did that through the cross. Period. End of story. It’s party time. We know Satan’s final destiny; he’ll be thrown into the abyss forever (Rev 20:3). I love what one pastor said once, “When Satan reminds you of your past, remind him of his future!” While the victory has been won, the “fruits” of that victory have “not yet” been fully realized. Satan is the prince of this world (John 12:31) but his time is running out. We are living in what scholars call a time of the “already and not yet.” Christ has already defeated sin, death, and Satan. But, we are waiting for him to return again.

As we wait, the battle cry is to be strong in the Lord and to put on the full armor of God. Have you heard the battle cry? Are you ready for the fight? If you are like me, the answer is probably no, you’re not ready. I can’t tell you how many times I have put on my own armor and have relied on my own strength!

I love the Pitchfork of Pride—“I don’t need God’s help with this problem, it’s all about me.” There’s the Atom Bomb of Intelligence—“I’ll rationally think through this issue and problem solve this thing myself, I’ll be fine.” Or how about the Sword of Self—“It’s not about who I am in Christ that really matters; what matters is what others say about me, how I look, how much money is in the bank, etc.” Or what about the Shield of Self-confidence—“I can do this on my own!”

Paul’s battle cry needs to be heard by you and me today because the next point he makes is that the battle is not human! Let’s read verse 11 again and then verse 12. Listen to how the enemy and his strategy are described.

## II. The Enemy

**“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 6:11–12).

I am not much of a war strategist at all, surprise, surprise, but what I do know is that a key to winning any battle is to know the enemy and their tactics. In these two verses Paul gives us just a peak at the enemy and his strategy and it is a little unnerving.

He first tells us to stand firm against the “schemes” of the devil. This is an interesting Greek word, *methodeia*. Our English word methods is derived from it. The devil is crafty, the devil has many methods to use against us. His ways are sneaky, attractive, desirable, and can even look good. The devil is a schemer. He and his forces study us and contrive covert ways to tempt us and make us fall. Remember, these forces hate the light and do their bidding in the secret and in the dark. Satan prefers slithering like a snake in the garden and sneaks through the gate as a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Paul also says that this struggle is “our” struggle. I love Paul’s honesty. This is Paul’s struggle, and my struggle too. He was not a superhero Apostle nor am I a superhero pastor (hard to believe right?). The word for “struggle” used here is loaded with meaning. It literally means to wrestle. The picture is of hand-to-hand combat with the enemy and his demonic forces. The reason we are called to arms and called to battle is because we are in wrestling match with a very powerful enemy and the battle is “not against flesh and blood,” it is spiritual. He is not saying that we still won’t experience earthly struggles, we do, we absolutely do! Many of you are there right now, struggling with very real, very tangible earthly problems.

But in verse 12 we are given a description of a whole host of adversaries namely the, “rulers...powers...world forces of darkness...spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”.

There are two interpretations to this chilling list. First, Paul is referring to the cosmic and the demonic forces of evil that the Ephesians are plenty aware of. They know there is demonic and satanic activity, they have seen it for themselves. Acts 19 gives us a picture of what was going on in Ephesus during Paul’s day.

The second thing Paul is saying here is that not only are these forces active in the spiritual realm, but they are also very prevalent in the earthly realm as well. He could be referring to the structures of thought,

tradition, convention, law, authority and yes even religion can and are used as forces of evil.

Now, I'd like to stop and again clarify our understanding of Satan. Often times I believe that we give too much glory to Satan. What I mean is that we can easily give him too much credit for things that happen to us and to our world. We disregard our sin nature, our flesh and our evil hearts. We need to remember that Satan is a created being. He is not equal in any way to God. He is not omnipresent, omniscience, or omnipotent. He is limited. As one man said, "The devil is a roaring lion but he is on a leash and the length of that leash is determined by the Lord." While Satan is limited, he is also very powerful and that is the point Paul is making.

Several years ago I got a good taste of this reality when I traveled to Haiti. For several days we ministered in the Dominican Republic, which is just a beautiful and wonderful place. The time came to drive to the border and cross into Haiti and I'll just never forget what I saw and how I felt that day. We finally got over the border and the landscape changed drastically. We went from a Caribbean paradise to a land stripped of its natural resources, its trees especially and its beauty. I could not believe I was on the same island of Hispaniola! The town we were in was filthy, poor and desolate. I could taste the evil, oppression and desperation of the people. While many of the folks we ministered to were wonderful, I got to see first hand why Haiti is considered the poorest country in the western hemisphere. After hearing stories of witchcraft and voodoo that made my skin crawl, I had a very hard time going to bed that night. In fact, I could hear the drums of the witch doctors of the village we were in as I tried to get some sleep. The spiritual struggle Paul describes here became very real and tangible to me that night.

The charge Paul is giving us is that we need to know our enemy in order to stand firm. Do you know his tactics well enough? Do you know the specific ways he tempts you? Do you know your own weakness and blind spots? You should read *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis or Wiersbe's *The Strategy of Satan*.

Thankfully Paul does not end with bad news. Paul is not "Debbie Downer" for all you SNL fans. The encouragement he gives us next is this—the devil can be resisted! We are not alone and unprepared. In fact, we have available all that is necessary to fight because God has provided his own armor for the battle.

### III. The Armor of God

**"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;**

**and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,..."** (Ephesians 6:13–17).

I am reminded of David's battle with Goliath here. Remember the scene? David goes into King Saul's tent and tells him that he'll fight Goliath. Saul says, ok, no one else is willing to do it. So Saul grabs his armor and gives it to David. Remember what happens next? The armor is way too big and awkward for David so he tells Saul that he'll go out there with his staff, sling shot, and five smooth stones. And while Israel must have winced at seeing an unarmed boy walk out to Goliath, what they didn't see is that David was fully prepared with God's armor! And the rest is history.

Listen to how Isaiah described God's armor in 59:17, "**He put on righteousness like 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 mantle.**" The same armor that David used to defeat Goliath is available to us today, it is God's own armor, and he provides it all. And guess what, it fits us perfectly and is exactly what we need for the battle.

I picture Paul writing this letter in his jail cell while looking at the Roman soldier guarding him. As a good Rabbi and scholar of the Old Testament, he then combines this visual with the descriptions of God as a warrior. He then paints for us a picture using six images of armor, telling his readers what they represent and what action is needed to put them on.

The armor of God is required because of the "evil days," both the present evil days we live in and also specific times of satanic attack when we are extremely tempted to yield and give into the enemy.

We've looked at the battle cry, we've learned some of our enemy's tactics, now let's look more closely at each piece of armor.

**a. Belt of Truth.** The first piece of armor is the belt of truth. Usually made of leather, the soldier's belt actually belonged to his underwear and held his tunic and his sword in place. We are told to "gird our loins" (which we don't do anymore) with truth. In other words we need to fasten or tighten our belts and be ready for action.

The truth can mean two things. First the truth of God revealed in the Bible namely, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "**I am the truth**" (John 14:6). But it also means the truth of character or what we would call today, integrity. Isn't it true that from the truth of Christ flows the integrity of heart in us? Paul tells us to tighten our belt with truth first and prepare ourselves for action.

**b. Breastplate of Righteousness.** The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of a Roman soldier actually covered both his front and back. It protected all his vital organs.

Like the belt of truth, the breastplate can be interpreted in two ways. First, it refers to our position in Christ. Often in Paul's writings righteousness and justification are synonymous. God has made us right, he has justified us with himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The breastplate is our righteous relationship with God. We are told to put on God's righteousness, the new self on like a breastplate. And once we have been justified, the result is the righteous lives we live with the Spirit's help. We are men and women of truth, righteousness, and holiness because God has made us right with himself.

**c. Boots of the Gospel of Peace.** The third piece of armor is the boots of the Gospel of peace. We are told to "shod our feet" or to put on boots. These boots refers to the half boot of the Roman soldier, specifically designed for long marches. These boots protected the soldier's feet from sliding out from under him. The Gospel of peace as boots is the good news that we are at peace with God. The Gospel gives us certain firmness and makes us steadfast during troubled times, during battle. The gospel of peace as boots also prepares us to proclaim peace to others. Only those who have peace with God are ready to announce peace to others. As shoes carry us from place to place, the Gospel of peace as boots prepare us to speak about Jesus to others.

How are your boots fitting you these days? Specifically, do you know how to tell others about your faith in Jesus? When was the last time you shared your story and God's story with someone?

**d. Shield of Faith.** The fourth piece of armor is the shield of faith. There were two kinds of shields soldiers had during those days. One was small and the other was large and oblong. Paul is referring to the large one here. These large shields were very effective in battle. In battle this (shield) could be locked together with others to form a wall in front and a roof overhead. If you've seen the movie *300* you know what I am talking about.

Through faith we see our circumstances through God's eyes, we are able to trust in him to keep us from temptation and doubt, and stand safely behind his shield of protection. In fact, Proverbs 30:5 tell us that God himself is our shield and refuge.

Faith lays hold of the promises of God and his power on our behalf. The shield of faith protects us from the darts of the devil. What are those darts? They are at least:

- false accusations
- false guilt
- thoughts
- doubt
- disobedience
- lust
- fear

What do you run to when the pressure and the heat are turned on? Do you run to God in times of doubt and fear? What about in times of trouble and temptation? Or do you run to something else?

**e. The Helmet of Salvation.** The fifth piece of armor is the helmet of salvation. The Christian's helmet is

salvation. We belong to Jesus Christ! The helmet is the measure of salvation we already have in Christ. We have been forgiven, we have been adopted into his family, we are his! The fact that we are saved and that we will one day be saved from this world protects our head and our mind like a helmet.

**f. Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.** The sixth piece of armor is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. In the Roman arsenal, there were two swords, a long one and a short one. Paul is referring to the short sword again suited for hand-to-hand combat. This small sword was razor sharp, very light, and highly effective. It is also the only offensive piece of armor we have.

The word of God helps us to resist temptation. Like a sword it cuts through the façade of temptation and exposes it for what it really is. I am reminded of Jesus, as he was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. What was his defense? The Word of God. Specifically, he quoted from the book of Deuteronomy. At these words, the Word of God, Satan fled. The sword is also a piece of armor for evangelism. Like a sword, the Word of God cuts through people's defenses, it pricks at their conscience, and stabs them spiritually awake.

If Jesus had to know Scripture in order to resist Satan and win victory over him, how much more do you and I need to know it? How are you doing at knowing God's word and at memorizing it? This is an area that I am weak in and one that the Lord constantly taps on my shoulder about.

Another area that the Lord continues to work out in me is prayer. It is prayer that we read about next.

#### IV. How to Put on the Armor

**"...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak"** (Ephesians 6:18-20).

Apparently, we can be fully clothed in God's armor and yet fail to stand firm because we do not call upon God in prayer. Paul ends the book of Ephesians by calling us to be people of prayer. Prayer should pervade all our spiritual warfare.

We are told to:

- Pray at all times (both regular and consistent prayer)
- With all prayer and supplication (there is no one way to pray)
- With all perseverance (as good soldiers we need to stay alert and not give up or fall asleep)
- Making supplication for all the saints (we are

told to pray for all believers because we are in this battle together)

- Pray also for me (we need to be praying for our spiritual leaders)

Why is prayer so important? Because above all, it expresses our reliance on God.

How do we put on the armor? I think there are two ways:

**1. We pray it on.** My mother-in-law really is the one who taught me how to put on the armor of God. She basically would tell me to pray on the armor whenever I would go on a mission trip or before I was preaching, etc. It took me a while to get what she was saying. But she is right, that is how we put on the armor.

While we are called to be people of prayer and told to pray on the armor, we are also encouraged to know what we believe.

**2. We need to know what we believe.** The second way to put on the armor is to know what we believe. How can we pray on the armor and lay hold of it if you and I do not know what in the world Paul means by truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the gospel, and the word of God? Now I am not saying that you need to go to cemetery—I mean, seminary—but we need to know and understand the great doctrines of the faith.

Do you know the great truths of Christianity? Can you explain them? Has the truth of them sunken deeply into your heart and mind?

## CONCLUSION

If Satan is our very real and very powerful enemy, what, if anything is our protection from him? How do we fight him? How do we survive spiritual warfare? The answer is: The Armor of God. We as Christians are in the battle against the devil and his forces and must stand firm and take up the full armor of God against them.

I had three goals for this sermon:

**1. The Not-Yet Christian.** I wanted to persuade you that there is an unseen spiritual battle going on. There IS a Devil and he wants to destroy you. If you are not yet a Christian the truth is that you are powerless against Satan. Paul tells us to put on the new self, put on Christ, etc. Have you put your faith in Christ yet? I hope you do.

**2. The New Christian.** I wanted to help equip you for battle by explaining the Armor of God and how to put it on. As a new Christian I had no idea that I was in a battle nor was I prepared for that battle. My hope is that now you are in some way equipped, encouraged and ready to face the enemy

**3. The Mature Christian.** I wanted to simply remind you of the battle, the armor, and to encourage you to stand firm. Sometimes as believers we can get complacent and think that we are living in a time of peace. We are not, the battle continues to rage. Is your armor on? Are you fighting the good fight? Think through the pieces of armor and evaluate the state of your readiness. Pray on the Armor of God.