

The Armor of God

Ephesians 6:13-20

For the last two thousand years, followers of Jesus have spoken of three enemies of the soul. "The world, the flesh, and the devil." So often, we have this sneaking suspicion that we're not experiencing the life that God has for us, and neither are the people around us. There is this constant sense of opposition, of resistance both internal and external. Inside of us and in the world around us.

As we reach the end of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, we gain an understanding of what weapons God has given us to be able to step into and engage in the spiritual battle that's happening all around us.

Ephesians 6:13-20 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. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

In verse 10-12 Paul says, *"Here is the Christian life. Here's what it looks like to live it out. You are in a cosmic battle! And there are very real forces at play and around our lives trying to undermine God's work in you and through you."*

Paul, using a military metaphor, that God has given us **spiritual armor**, and weapons that we use as we engage in this cosmic battle.

1. In an attempt to explain where evil comes from, and why it exists in the world, a Harvard psychologist named BF Skinner wrote extensively about the idea that every single problem you face in life is a result of your environment and the way you were raised. **It's the world**, it's how you were trained to think and view life itself.

2. Other experts say, "It's not your environment. The problems in your life are a result of your biological makeup. It's your genes. **It's your flesh.** People have predispositions toward violence or addiction. Your choices will make you or break you, it's your flesh.
3. There are those that say, *there's a force of evil that we can't see at work in the world... how else do you explain all the brokenness and pain that exists?* There is a belief in some religious circles that behind every bad thing, there is a supernatural force or being that is causing it to happen. So, **it's all the devil.**

Q: Which is it? Who is right? Who is wrong?

A: They're right and wrong because the truth is, it's not just the world, it's not just the flesh, and it's not just the devil. **It's all three.** Evil comes at you from every angle it can. It's contending in you, around you, and beyond you.

Paul sets this up by saying, "*Look, I want you to know what you're dealing with here...*"

Ephesians 6:12 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.

Some of us aren't convinced we're in a spiritual battle, and that's why we're losing it. Some of us have gained victory over temptations or struggles in our lives, but the enemy just changed tactics and he's exploiting other weaknesses **in your armor**, exploiting whatever gaps he can find.

One of the most fascinating stories is when Elijah challenges the 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah calls them out, challenges them to see whose God is the real God, so the prophets build an altar and pray that Baal would answer their prayers by sending fire to burn the offering on the altar. They're calling out and praying, trying to find the magic combination that will get Baal to respond. But nothing happens.

1 Kings 18:27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

Then Elijah builds an altar, douses it with four jars of water, digs a trench filled with water around it, and prays to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Miraculously, fire falls on the altar and consumes it. And the prophets of Baal were defeated.

Elijah then falls into a depression! He's received a threat because of the victory he'd just won. He flees into the Negev desert, sulks under a broom tree, and prays that he might die! He's discouraged, despondent, and inconsolable right after one of the greatest victories in the entirety of the Old Testament!

APP: You're never more susceptible to spiritual attack then right after your greatest spiritual victories.

PERSONAL: My most vulnerable moments are Sunday afternoons/evenings. Over the years, I've learned some ways to battle the enemy.

1 Kings 18:5-6 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water.

- Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is just take a nap! Isn't that good news?!

The good news is, no matter where you find yourself in the spiritual battle, there is an enormous amount of hope in this passage.

Q: What do we do? How do we gain and walk in victory? How do we wage war against our flesh, the world, and the devil himself?

Paul writes,

2 Corinthians 10:4 For the **weapons of our warfare** are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to **obey Christ**, ⁶ being ready to **punish every disobedience**, when your **obedience is complete**.

Paul says that the weapons of our warfare have divine power—they destroy strongholds! He then mentions **obedience** several times in these verses. Obey Christ, being ready to punish disobedience. Paul is saying that obedience is central to winning the spiritual battle.

Puritan writer William Gurnall wrote, "It requires more prowess and greatness of spirit to **obey God faithfully** than to command an army of men ..."

- William Gurnall, *This Christian in Complete Armour*

We see this throughout scripture. In many cases, to obey God requires some level of insanity.

- God tells Moses, *"Moses, even though you killed an Egyptian man and fled for your life, go back to Egypt to talk with pharaoh about freeing millions of his Hebrew slaves."*
- *"Abraham, you're going to be the father of many nations, but first, get your family and walk away from everything you've ever known..."*
- *"Noah, even though it has never rained before, and human beings can't even fathom the concept of rain, one day, it's going to rain. The whole earth is going to flood, so build a massive boat. You'll be mocked, ridiculed, everyone will think you've lost your mind. But do it anyway."*

OBJ: Why would any sane person do any of these things? Who would follow through?

- For Moses, Abraham, and Noah, there was serious wrestling going on! It wasn't always easy to obey God in these situations.

To summarize J.C. Ryle's quote from last week, *"The inner turmoil, the strugglings and wrestlings as you try to obey Christ are not evidence **against** the genuineness of your faith, but evidence **for** it!"*

- If you find yourself battling, struggling, or in spiritual turmoil right now—be encouraged! **God is at work!**

Romans 5:3-4 ...we rejoice in our **sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...

- The word suffering, in this context, means "under great pressure or distress."

In other words, we rejoice when we're wrestling. Why? Because God is strengthening us. Just as Moses, Abraham, and Noah obeyed when everything was telling them not to,

- **When you obey Christ**, God grows in you an endurance, perseverance, character, and hope that one day God will fulfill every single thing that He's promised, and that is a hope that does not disappoint.

Paul tells us that wrestling, struggling, battling against authorities, rulers, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil... that is the Christian life.

A comfortable, Christian life is actually not a Christian life at all. A life of faithful obedience to Jesus, regardless of the opposition in me, around me, or beyond me—that is what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Q: What is the armor? How do we use it?

Paul tells us that to live a victorious life, we must **put on the whole armor of God**.

The Belt of Truth

A roman belt was the foundation for the rest of the armor. In the ancient times, if you were going to do anything active, you had to take all your flowing robes and tie them into your belt so that you could move quickly and not get tripped up. This was the first step to prepare for battle.

Paul equates this first foundational step with the truth of God's word. If you don't build your life on the truth of God's Word, if it's not authoritative, if it's not the foundation of everything else you do, you're toast before you even get started. **You can't add any other armor to your life.** Build your life on the sure foundation of the truth of God's Word.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Every now and then, the accuser comes after you, condemning, pointing out all your flaws and failures. You see your inconsistencies as a follower of Christ and begin to wonder if you're even a Christian. *Do I even belong to God?* The devil says, *"Look at what a lazy Christian you are. Look at your sinfulness. You think God is pleased with you? You think God could possibly love you?"*

When the devil comes and says, *"You'll never be good enough for God,"* you put on that armor by saying, *"You're right. But He's good enough FOR me."*

My acceptance into God's family has never been based on my goodness, but on God's goodness in my place! His love for me is infinitely more powerful than the devil's hate for me will ever be. By doing this, you're actively taking the righteousness that Jesus lived for you, applying it, and appropriating it to your life.

The Sandals of Peace

A Roman soldier's shoes were like the original cleats. They had to have **traction**. They had to be **durable**—they had to be able to take a beating and stay together. They had to be **light**. You had to be able to move quickly, to be agile. If you don't have the right shoes, you're at a major disadvantage in battle.

Put on the readiness, that comes FROM the gospel of peace. Readiness of heart, living a life of preparedness.

- A follower of Christ is supposed to have some traction about them, some confidence about their footing in life.
- They're supposed to be durable. They're able to take some hits without falling into despair and self-pity.
- They're supposed to be light, filled with joy, and help others feel lighter.

The Shield of Faith

A Roman shield was huge! Because they were so big, they were only used in certain times of battle, mainly when the Romans were attempting to besiege another fortified city. Why? Because the enemy was up there, and the Romans were down below trying to break in. Enemies would hurl flaming objects or arrows at them, and the Roman soldiers would get into a formation where nothing could break through their barricade. Their shields would interlock around and above them, and nothing could get past them.

Q: Now, what does this tell us?

1. **When you're taking spiritual ground, don't expect the enemy to be okay with it!** He's going to throw anything and everything he can at you. It's in these moments when you need your shield—when you're taking spiritual ground.
2. Your faith protects those around you from the attacks of the enemy. We need another in this spiritual battle.

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet was the last piece of defensive armor that you'd put on before battle, and possibly was the most important because it protects your mind. A Roman Helmet was not only incredibly strong, but it was also incredibly ornate. They were like beautiful

pieces of art, designed to look like different animals with etchings in the metal. They were used in both battle and in Roman ceremonies and parades.

When you are walking in confident assurance of God's gift of salvation for you, when you are resting in all that God has done for you through the person of Jesus, not only is your mind protected from the lies of the enemy, but you instantly become a noticeable individual. When you're walking in all that God's gift of salvation means, there is going to be something unique, powerful, and attractive about you. Your countenance changes, and how you carry yourself changes. You're filled with a new assurance and confidence as you face the world.

The Sword of The Spirit

The last piece of weaponry we're given is the sword. It's the only truly offensive weapon in our artillery. We know the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God...

When you're in the spiritual battle, it's not enough to rationalize your way through the battle. Jesus doesn't even combat the devil with His own intellect or wit. What does He use? The Word of God. **He quotes the scriptures. He fights the devil with truth.**

Isn't it interesting that the armor begins with the belt of Truth and ends with the Sword of the Spirit? **The Armor of God begins and ends with the scriptures.** You want to be suited up, be able to stand firm in the evil day? Saturate your whole life in the gospel. Recite it, meditate on it day and night, fill your whole life with it. Not just to know it, but to obey it, to trust in it, to base your whole life on it.

That's putting on the armor of God. This is how we wage war.

In the 1st and into the 2nd century, there was a Roman captain named Trajan. This captain would take off His armor and place it on his wounded soldiers in the middle of battle. He would tear off his garments and use them as bandages for his men.

But that's nothing compared to what our captain did for us. Jesus didn't just lay down his armor or tear up his garments for us. Jesus Christ Himself was torn to shreds to heal our wounds. He took the nails and a spear that were meant for us into His own heart so that we might live.

Jesus Christ took His armor off so we could put the armor on. He made Himself vulnerable so we could be protected. He was disarmed and defeated so that we could be armed with heavenly artillery.

COMMUNION –

For those of you that are new to church, or aren't familiar with Communion...

- **The bread** represents the body of Christ that was broken for us...
- **The cup** symbolizes the blood of Christ poured out for us as Jesus was crucified on the cross.

Jesus Christ offered Himself up completely, unto death so that we could be clothed in the armor of God, so we could gain victory over the spiritual forces of evil at play all around us.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 ...The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread,²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."²⁵ In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Today, may you find victory and refreshment in the presence of Jesus. **May truth of the gospel be your armor**, as you seek to obey Him in all things, big and small.

Amen.

What is one area of your life your finding victory in right now? What habits or changes have led to success in this area of life?

If you were the devil, what would you do to take you out? Where are your greatest spiritual vulnerabilities? What changes would God have you make?

Notes: