

The Armor of God Eph. 6:10-20

For the last couple of months we've been walking through Ephesians together. And we've been able to look at God's grace from a variety of angles. We've looked at an extended explanation of the Gospel in chapters 1-3 and for the last 8 or so weeks we've been in chapters 4-6 looking at the implications of that gospel for all of life from the way we pursue spiritual growth, to the way we speak, to the way we forgive to marriage and parenting and work and today, in what is our 14th and final message in this series, we're going finish strong and see how it is that the Gospel trains us to put on the armor of God! This is such an epic finish to this book. Paul is going to zoom out to 10,000 feet and give us a cosmic perspective of what it looks to live in the power of the Gospel by putting on the armor of God.

And before we even get to the armor we need to make few crucial truths that will set the stage for our time today. 3 truths that we need to understand...

There is a real battle to fight. Ever since God came walking in the Garden in Genesis 3, God has been on mission to redeem his people and Satan and his demonic forces are dead set against it. And we learned in Eph. 2 that when Christ rose from the dead, he was set above "far above all rule authority power and dominion" and so in his life, death, and resurrection, Christ defeated the grave and bought eternal life for his people." And so at the outset, we need to say that the War has already been won. The victory of the church is certain. Jesus said it in Mt. 16. Just because we don't need to worry, doesn't mean we don't need to fight. And the fight I'm referring to is the spread of the Gospel and conversion of sinners.

And when Jesus ascends to heaven after his resurrection, he leaves behind a relatively small group of believers who he's tasked with advancing the Gospel and making disciples of all nations. And as they do it grows bit by bit convert by convert and the borders of god's kingdom expands and that's what Paul was so passionate, he sees his life through a cosmic lens where his efforts to spread the Gospel were a constant assault to the enemy. That's why Paul frames this entire conversation about spiritual warfare around the advancement of the Gospel, look at vs. 19 Paul asks for prayer, "that words may be given 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." Paul realized the eternal cosmic implication at stake in proclaiming the gospel. That every square inch of this earth is a battlefield for people's souls. That there is an army of demonic powers who are doing everything they can to deceive people with the offerings of this world and blind people to the truth of the Gospel. And his goal and our goal is to live in a wartime mentality as members of God's army who are leaving it all on the field to advance the saving work of the king. So make no mistake about it. The stakes are high. The consequences are eternal. And the enemy is formidable...

In vs. 11-12 he says "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." There is a real battle to fight and...

There is an invisible and yet utterly real spiritual world. There are real powerful demonic forces that are intelligently and relentlessly assaulting the church and its work to advance the Gospel. And they are led

by the devil, Satan. Satan is not a man in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork. He is a fallen angel and is very powerful, and evil and wicked from the inside out—and he hates you. And he hates God. And he and his demonic army work primarily by deceiving people into believing lies. One author said “... the devil doesn't come dressed in a red cape and pointy horns. He comes as everything you've ever wished for ...” And yet in the West we’ve dismissed demonic activity as fanciful creations of Hollywood and mere figments of our imagination that pose no greater threat than Casper the friendly ghost. And the spiritual forces of evil would like nothing more than for us this morning to continue on with little to no awareness of their operations because the reality is that while people are recreationally telling “ghost stories” around the campfire, real demonic entities are at work all over the world, oppressing and deceiving people comfortably and happily into hell. And so need to realize that we are in a real battle, with a real formidable enemy, which means that we need real help...

The strength we need to stand our ground comes from being united to Christ.

Now we’ve already said that Christ has won the war, the end of this thing isn’t up in the air, God wins. But until the trumpet sounds we have still have a battle to fight—day in and day out—and we can’t do it in our own strength. Paul says in vs. 10, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” Notice that the focus here is on his strength not ours. His might not ours. The ability that we have to stand against demonic activity isn’t some talent we have, but comes from God’s strength that’s available to us through being in Christ. Ironman example.

And in Isa. 11, 52 and 57, God is described as a warrior wearing armor coming to vindicate his people. And it’s language of God’s armor that Paul borrows from Isaiah and uses to describe how the church needs to dress for battle. And he says both in vs. 11 and vs. 13 that we need to put on the whole armor of God so that we can stand our ground. Notice stand. He uses in 11 and then 3 times in verses 13 and 14 alone. He’s emphasizing here that our goal is primarily defensive. We’re fending off the attacks of the enemy. We’re not going after them. This isn’t like ghostbusters. We’re not Christian cowboys who go out and wrangle the bad guys. They will attack us. They do attacks us. And to stand firm is to not be deceived by their lies, or allured by their temptations, or lulled to sleep by spiritual apathy and laziness. So we have a real battle, a formidable enemy, the strength we need in Christ and now we’re ready to talk about this armor...

Vs 14 “Stand firm therefore having fastened on the belt of truth” To stay grounded in this battle we’re going to have to be anchored in truth. Paul knows that so often from the second we wake up we have feelings about God and about ourselves that aren’t true. And the enemy is pleased to take those feelings and help you believe that they’re true. We feel God isn’t good to us and doesn’t want our best. We feel like our identity come from our achievements. We feel like God’s loves us because of our obedience and devotion to him—and when we do the enemy says “Yes.” “That’s right” But it’s not. And the only way to guard against feelings that lie to you is to be intentional to remind yourself of what’s true! We need truth-shaped feelings! That’s part of my job as a pastor is not just to teach new stuff every week but to remind you. 2 Pet. 1:13 “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder.” We have to be rooted in truth—the truth of God revealed in Scripture—if we’re going to stand firm.

Second, he mentions that we need to “put on the breastplate of righteousness”. This is referring to the godliness and holiness that’s produced in us by the Spirit. And for the last couple of weeks we’ve talked

about what righteousness looks like in relationships and speech, and parenting, and work. And it may be obvious, but it's worth saying, that it's not God's desire that we simply learn about what a life changed by the Gospel looks like and then not appropriate that to our own life. We don't just know about righteousness, it's something you have to put it on—and live in it. And it's not just a matter of obedience, it's a matter of effectiveness in , Look at 2 Tim. 2:21, “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” Like God is building his church and if you're pursuing holiness and not being led away into sin and temptation, you're way more useful to God when he puts you on the field. So we're being guided by truth and we're expressing that truth in righteous holy living and then...

Vs. 15, we come to women's favorite part—shoes (Tony Merida) “as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” Doesn't actually say shoes—it literally says have your feet fitted with readiness, but the idea is there. Scholars go back and forth about whether this means that the gospel makes us ready or that we need to be willing to share the Gospel. And either way, we know the Gospel makes us ready and gives us the strength to stand against the enemy and one of the things it makes us ready to do it share the Gospel—the good news. In fact, this verse is Paul's adaptation of Isa. 52:7 where he says, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” God has designed the Gospel to go forward by believers communicating it—with their words. And this is an area where we are particularly desperate for God's grace. LifeWay research shows that only 39% percent of practicing Christians have shared their faith in the last 6 months. ~~You add to that nearly half (48%) of church attendees have not invited an unchurched person to church or a church program in the last 6 months.~~ And this is where we've really got to ask ourselves, like have we really put on this piece of the armor? It's no mistake that Paul says twice (vs. 11-13) that we have to put on the whole armor of God, which means that this part isn't optional even if it's uncomfortable or inconvenient—even if we're introverts or busy. I mean if you were in Walmart would and you heard someone ask “I wish someone would tell me about the Gospel” would you? It will cost you something to share the Gospel—your comfort or reputation—but I can promise you it will cost them a lot more if you don't. This why is at the beginning of 2019, we're going to be doing an entire series on how to share your faith and make disciples and how to use your relationships to gently and intelligently present the Gospel. God help us be faithful.

Next we're told 16 “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the enemy...” And one of the most immediate applications here is that our faith can't be in our circumstances. It has to be in Christ. I've been burdened this week for people who's faith is falling apart because the circumstances in their lives aren't going well. And Christ's word to you is not that you'll get everything you want, but that in Him you have everything you need. ~~House on rock.~~ He hasn't promised to take you out of the battle, but to be with you in the battle. The enemy is going to launch—flaming darts at you—circumstance that make you doubt the goodness, love, and power of God—and you have to take up the shield of faith and trust Him when it doesn't make sense. You've got to take up the shield of faith and sing, “When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace; In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil. His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood, When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.” We take up the shield of faith and then in vs 17

We're told “to take the helmet of salvation...”

The helmet here is the certainty that you belong to Christ; that you're in the royal family; this is how Satan

tried to tempt Jesus by questioning who he was, “if you’re really the son of God...do this” And he does the same to you, “If you really belonged to Christ—you wouldn’t struggle like you do.” “If you were really his son or his daughter, your life would be going so much better. So you probably need to try a little harder if you actually want God to love you.” Don’t buy it. Put on your helmet rest in your status as a child of God.

And the last piece of the ensemble is the sword of the Spirit, **and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God** This is phrase “word of God” is a phrase Paul uses to refer to the Gospel message particularly the spoken message of the Gospel and this is what the Spirit uses to deal blows to the enemy. And that is why it’s so important that we know the word and store it up in our hearts. Notice that in this entire ensemble, the sword is our only offensive weapon. And if we’re equipped with the Word if we’re not storing up the truths of the gospel in our hearts, we won’t be Gospel to ourselves and others and we’ll find ourselves in the midst of battle without a sword. When Satan tempts us to believe that God can’t love us because of what we’ve done, we take out our sword and say Romans 8. Friends pick up your sword and fight against the spiritual darkness by with the Word of truth.

Now Paul’s final words to us have to do with prayer and while this isn’t technically listed as part of our armor, it’s a crucial part of our stand against the enemy, vs. **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...**

He mentions prayer 4 times in one verse—praying, prayer, and supplication twice. This isn’t a quick add-on. And Paul’s not talking bout saying a prayer before meals or bed time here. Look at the language here at all times with all perseverance, for all the saints—he’s saying that as soldiers in a battle that we don’t have the power to fight in our own strength, desperate constant prayer to God should be the air we breathe—always needing his grace and strength, constantly be crying out to God for ourselves and for other believers. I can’t tell you how much it means to me when people tell me they’re praying for me—I need it. You need. There’s power in prayer. It’s not just therapeutic it’s mission critical. I love Piper here, **“We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war...Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world.**

And that kingdom advancing is the point of this entire battle, it’s the point of the armor, Paul realizes that’s exactly why he asks for prayer... **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.** As someone in prison you think he might have requested prayer to get out of prison or that the persecution would stop, but he realized that his suffering were light and momentary compared the eternal simpication at stake in his proclamation of the Gospel.

It should make you feel good that the apostle Paul himself is asking for prayer to proclaim the gospel and have the boldness to say the things he needs to say—apparently he didn’t just feel like he was that gifted.

He wants prayer to communicate the Gospel faithfully because the kingdom of God isn't going to be advanced any other way. Not then in Ephesus, not now in Roanoke. Like we live day in and day out on a spiritual battlefield where people's eternity's hang in the balance? You say I Roanoke yes! In 2010 Roanoke's population was about 124,000 within a 7 mile radius of the center of the city. And of that 124,000 how many of those people are classified as unreached? 70%. Now that doesn't mean they don't have access to the Gospel, it means that for 7 out of 10 people you run into around here, have never heard the Gospel presented to them. They've heard about heaven and hell, they've heard about the Ten Commandments, they've heard about Jonah and the whale, and they think you have to be a good person and go to church and say your prayers...but they've heard the news Christ has taken the punishment for their sin and offers them his perfect righteousness through repentance and faith. You add to that 7,087 people groups, 3.14 billion people, 41.4 percent of people unreached with the Gospel who if they were to die right now would plunge into a Christless eternity. And that's why we have to put on our armor and make sure we're leaving it all on the field because the stakes are high and the consequences are eternal. You may noticed that there is no back piece listed in the armor—nothing to protect your back. John Bunyan imagined that the reason armor for the back is that for believers, retreat is not an option. And it's not. We've been united to Christ who's guaranteed victory, we're empowered by the Holy Spirit, and have everything we need to stand against the enemy. One day we'll trade our armor for robes of white and there will be no more battle to fight. But until then, keep your armor on and fight the good fight of faith.